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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Rev. Dr. Xavier S. Thaninayagam is founder and Chief-Editor of this Journal. He is a member of the Department of Education, University of Ceylon, and is at present engaged in research work at the London Institute of Education.

G. Vanmikanathan is the Retired Deputy Secretary to the Government of India at New Delhi-5. He is a keen student of *Tiruva:cagam.*

Swami Vipulananda—The late Swami was a member of the Ramakrishna Mission. He was for some years Professor of Tamil in the Annamalai University and later till his death in the University of Ceylon. He was the author of யாழ் நூல் (*Ya:l-Nu:l*).

Dr. Kamil Zvelebil is the Head of the Department of Dravidology, University of Prague. He has translated many Tamil works into Czech and is an indefatigable research worker.

K. P. S. Hameed is Programme Officer, All India Radio, Trivandrum.

V. Kandaswami Mudaliar has a flair for translation and has translated many poems in the Sangam Literature into English.

Language Rights in Ceylon

XAVIER S. THANI NAYAGAM

I

On the language issue, fairness and justice demand that Ceylon studies the nature of language rights and their application in international law before hurrying with any legislation which may mean a threat to the peace and unity of the country.

Public opinion on the language policy in Ceylon, even among prominent political leaders, is not founded as yet on a sufficient or full and accurate knowledge of language rights for any government to consider as decisive and final the demand of any section of the people, howsoever large. For even a majority demand to be considered, that demand must be just, right, lawful and reasonable.

A popular slogan in recent months has been the one that the language of the majority should be the language of the entire State. This demand would be valid only if the end and purpose of political life in Ceylon were the creation of a homogeneous sovereign Sinhalese nation and a Sinhalese State in the predominantly Sinhalese-speaking areas, but not if the end and purpose were the formation of a Ceylonese nation and a Ceylonese State co-extensive with All Ceylon. The concept of a uninational unilingual State in a multi-national, multi-lingual country is fraught with the greatest dangers for the unity and peace of the country. The multi-lingual, multi-national State is the ideal state in political theory today, particularly in the light of the experience of the last two world wars and the peace-

treaties which followed. There is a return in political thought to the principles outlined by Lord Acton :

> "If we take the establishment of liberty for the realization of duties to be the end of civil liberty, we must conclude that those states are substantially the most perfect which . . . include various distinct nationalities without oppressing them. Those in which no mixture of races has occurred are imperfect, and those in which its effects have disappeared are decrepit. A state which is incompetent to satisfy different races condemns itself ; a state which labours to neutralize, to absorb or to expel them destroys its own vitality ; a state which does not include them is destitute of the chief basis of self-government."[1]

Very much earlier King Stephen of Hungary had said :

> "A state with but one language and one way of life is both weak and decrepit."

Rule by Majority

The rule by majority is misunderstood even by very educated people. Appeals have been made to the Jeffersonian principle of *lex maior fortis* with no regard to the different federal conditions in which that principle was defined and worked. Democratic method is rule by majority indeed, but not a rule for the exclusive good of an ethnic-religious-language majority. Democracy is rule by majority for the good of all the groups which have membership within the state. Jefferson himself explained his principle in words very familiar to those who value laws and liberties :

> "All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is to prevail in all cases, that will to be rightful must be reasonable ; that the minority possess their equal rights which equal law must protect, and to violate would be oppression."[2]

We are liable to give a twist to majority rule in the traditions of our autocratic, monarchic, and feudalistic past.

[1] *Essays on Freedom.*
[2] *First Inaugural Address.*

The rule by majority is but a working substitute for rule by unanimity which is the ideal. To impose one language only all over Ceylon as the language of the State would be to deny liberty and freedom to a major nationality and to oppress it by what Tocqueville called the "tyranny of majority." Such an imposition would justify the separatist tendencies and movements for decentralisation implied in the American Declaration of Independence :

> "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted amongst men, receiving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new Government."

Such primary human rights as language rights intrinsically connected with freedom of speech are not to be decided by the mere arbitrary demand of any single group, or by an anachronistic and antiquarian appeal to the pre-Vijayan period of Ceylon's proto-history, but according to the principles of the common law of nations and their practice in this mid-twentieth century. Neither are the language rights of a people to be sacrificed for a naive Machiavellianism. The language problem is wider than political expediency. It is basically a problem of philosophy, of political and constitutional theory and practice, of ethics, and of sociology and human dynamics. Hence it is a field of enquiry not only for politicians but also for statesmen, for philosophers, for jurists and for sociologists.

The present trends in political, sociological and educational thought are towards self-determination and cultural autonomy within the framework of a decentralised State which combines political unity with cultural freedom, or which exercises "separation in union." The emphasis is not on national uniformity but on national unity, not on coercion but on liberty. Political unity is not to be achieved

at the expense of cultural liberty and freedom. One language is the basis for a culture and a nationality, but not for the making of a State.

The Prime Minister of Ceylon has summarised his ideal as an "Asian Switzerland." Switzerland has made a clear distinction between the "nation" and the "state," and its success is due to its democracy, its cultural freedom and its decentralised government. People who have lived long enough in the Cantons of Geneva, of Berne, of Zurich and of Ticino and travelled sufficiently through the unilingual and bilingual Cantons of the three major language groups will see in Switzerland more than passive neutralism and a remunerative rendezvous of tourists and international conferences. It is the home of liberty, of religious and language freedom, and the best example of a multi-national State. Switzerland has not thought it wisdom to prescribe one national religion or enjoin one national language though there is a language majority preponderantly large (72%). Loyalty to the State is high in Switzerland because of the freedom and cultural and language autonomy given to each of its component nationalities. Every citizen is first and foremost a Swiss, and then the member of his own nationality.

History does not offer one example of language speakers, in short a nationality, possessing a rich culture, literature and traditions, being assimilated by political methods by a neighbouring people numerically stronger. The associations of the Tamil language with Ceylon are so ancient, so widespread, so productive of creative energy and inspiration to both cultures, and so well established, that to seek to exterminate these associations by legislation is futile.

Neither coercion, nor assimilation, will achieve these purposes. Where language rights have been suppressed by force, they have always after a period assumed an irresistible and invincible strength. The Empire of the Hapsburgs,

Central Europe, Finland during the period of "Swedish only," Belgium during the period of "French only," Wales today, and Catalonia today offer us memorable warnings not to tamper with the language rights of a nationality. Prof. Vincent Harlow, Beit Professor of the History of the British Empire in the University of Oxford, after a recent visit to Ceylon wrote thus :

> "My wife and I landed at Jaffna and moved about the arid plain of the North which is the home of the ancient Ceylon Tamils. Unhappily one could not fail to sense the anger and distress of this hardy and intelligent community concerning the policy which is being strongly pressed among the Sinhalese majority, to establish Sinhalese as the sole official language and to create a 'Buddhist State,' . . . .
>
> "The determination of the Sinhalese to rebuild their ancient glories is perfectly understandable and their national tradition is a precious asset ; but unless Ceylon develops a satisfying Sinhalese-Tamil partnership, its future as an independent nation-state will be weakened and distracted by animosity and frustration.
>
> "I was talking the other day to a very intelligent Sinhalese student who stated the argument that if there was one official language it would exert a unifying influence. I told him that Britain herself in the course of her history had on more than one occasion fallen into that costly error." [3]

The Nation-State

This repeated emphasis on "majority" and "minority" as if the majority possessed greater rights and were entitled to greater privileges creates in members of smaller groups a sense of frustration and disappointment with the result that the strength and vitality of a State is constantly weakened. Macartney after a voluminous study of the minority problem in Europe concludes :

> "In its pursuit of the chimera of the national state Europe has entered upon a path beset with dangers to

3 *United Empire.* Jan.—Feb., 1956.

itself. It has set itself a false ideal, and one which, right or wrong, it can never achieve. Minorities will continue to exist, and will continue to present problems which statecraft will find insoluble until it tries the method—so rarely adopted hitherto—of applying the principles of justice, equality and good government. Then minorities will cease to be a torment to the State possessing them, and will become instead a blessing. May that day come soon!"[4]

Alfred Cobban makes the same reflection on the future of the problem in Ceylon:

"We must conclude that in Asia, as in Europe where there are inextricably mixed communities, containing two or more distinct, unassimilable and communally conscious people, the idea of the nation-state is out of place. In so far as the problem may be reduced to its simplest elements by taking out separable regions, this should be done. Where this is not possible, as for example in Ceylon or Singapore, the only hope lies in the establishment of cultural autonomy and the development of a sense of common citizenship by the operation of common political institutions . . . If federalism has a future in the Western world, where the tradition of the sovereign state has been so strong, it is not less likely to find appropriate conditions for its developments in the East, in which the conception of national sovereignty is a new and as yet a far from deeply rooted growth."[5]

What is significant in the practice of language rights in bilingual and multi-lingual countries is that the language of the smaller group may be restricted in function to an area as Swedish (9%) in Finland, and Italian (6%) in Switzerland, and English (15%) in Quebec, and French (45%) in Belgium, but the language of the smaller group always enjoys an equal official and national status with the majority language and official publications of national status are issued in both languages. The minority language is also recognized as a national language in the Constitutions.

[4] Macartney, *National Minorities*, p. 501.

[5] *National Self-determination*, p. 138.

Finland

Area : 130,827 sq. miles.

Population : 4,000,000.

National Languages : Finnish and Swedish.

(Swedish is spoken by 9% of the population).

Adopted, July 17, 1919.

Art. 14 : Finnish and Swedish shall be the National Languages of Finland.

The rights of Finnish citizens to use their mother-tongue, before the Courts and Administrative authorities, and to obtain from them documents in such language, shall be guaranteed by law, so as to safeguard the rights of the Finnish population and the rights of the Swedish population of the country in accordance with identical principles.

The State shall provide for the intellectual and economic needs of the Finnish and Swedish populations in accordance with identical principles.

Diet Act, Jan. 13, 1928 :

Art. 88 : In the transaction of business in the Diet, the Finnish or Swedish language shall be used.

The opinions and reports of committees as well as the written proposals of the Speaker's Conference and of the Committee for the Secretariat, should be drawn up in these two languages.

Written communications addressed by the Government to the Diet should likewise be drawn up in Finnish and Swedish.

Switzerland

Area : 15,737 sq. miles.

Population : $4\frac{1}{2}$ millions.

Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation. Sept. 12, 1848.

Art. 116 : German, French, Italian and Romansch are the national languages of Switzerland.

The official languages of the Confederation shall be— German, French and Italian.[6]

The Tamils are not a minority in Ceylon. They are a self-determining nationality, and the rights of Tamil to official and national recognition by the Ceylon State are far greater for legal, historical and cultural reasons than the rights of Swedish in Finland or English in Canada or English in the Union of South Africa or French and Italian in Switzerland. If Tamil has no national rights in Ceylon, no other language has a right in any country of the world.

If we are to form a Ceylonese nation, one may hope to do so not with the help of factors which divide us and which we need never surrender, not on one religion or one language or one culture, but on the common well-defined sea-gift territory which Nature and Nature's God have given us, on our common traditions of the past, and on a common form of government, federal or unitary. The essential constitutive element of the nation is sociological and psychological. There has been no single definition of a nation applicable to all times and to all countries. If I were to define a nation in the special context of Asian countries which are just beginning to form into nations, I would define it as " a group of people who belong to different ethnic stocks who speak different languages and pro-

[6] Peaslee, *Constitutions of the World.*

fess different religions, but who occupy a well-defined territory and have willed to live together under a common-government." The essential element of a nation consists in group sentiments and in the will to live together. It does not consist only in one language or one only religion or race, taken singly or the three even taken together. The Tamils form the Ceylonese nation together with the Sinhalese because the two groups while not surrendering their separate identity and cultural autonomy have willed to live together under common political institutions.

It is strange that the movement to deprive Tamil of a national status should synchronize with the Jayanthi Celebrations. One of the earliest charters of language rights was issued by the Buddha himself when, on being petitioned by two Brahmin monks that the doctrines be written in Sanskrit so as to prevent their being corrupted by monks probably speaking non-Aryan languages, the Enlightened One replied : "I allow you O Bhikkhus, to teach the word of the Buddhas each in his own language." What was wisdom for the religious teacher is also wisdom in statesmanship, for the language of religion has often been esoteric in the past, but never the language of affairs of government and of the state.

Appeal to Nobleness

A period of about two thousand five hundred years separate the Buddha and the present Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. St. Laurent, but the inalienable language rights have grown in definition and understanding since then. In answer to a question on purely constitutional federal practices in Canada, Mr. St. Laurent, then Minister of Justice, replied in words which any Tamil Parliamentarian may use today in Ceylon's House of Representatives :

> "It is not the manner of those who have themselves had the formation that comes from that long history which has brought us to this point in the civilization of

> mankind, to do things which the conscience of humanity at large would regard as dishonourable; and the conscience of humanity at large would frown upon an assemblage in this house that attempted to take from me and from those of my race the right to speak the language I learned from my infancy as one of the official languages in which the deliberations of this house may be carried on. So it is of everything else that is not with Section 92. If it is fair, if it is just, if it is proper according to the standards of human decency, it will be done; if it is unfair, if it is unjust, if it is improper, all members of this house will say, "It is not our manner to do such things."[7]

Is an appeal to such noble sentiments too elevated for Ceylon?

One who has studied sufficiently the theory of language rights and seen their working in governments and education in bilingual and multi-lingual countries will realise that the language problem in Ceylon can be solved with fairness and justice to both groups without prejudicing the cultural autonomy and the national status of either. He would be aware that both Sinhalese and Tamil require protection from the bilingualism which the present policy would tend to favour indiscriminately all over the country. He may propose no definite solution because he would feel a great deal of further discussion with persons of different views has to precede any definite solution. What is now required after the elections is more light and less heat in this controversy, more truthfulness and honesty and less exaggeration and rhetoric in this discussion. The method of dialectics, be it Buddhist, Hindu or Socratic is to confront ideas with opposing ideas in order that the dispute may lead to true ideas.

II

Whose Reason?

What is the reasonable use of Tamil? And whose "reason" is to decide what shall be its use? Is the reason

[7] R. M. Dawson, *Government of Canada*, p. 146.

to be the decision of a Sinhalese-speaking majority formulating its law upon the basis of its own demand, or is the reason which decides the use of Tamil to be the body of constitutional law and language rights as developed during these centuries of the evolution of human rights ?

The problem of language nationalities is no new problem in the world. It has existed from the period of the origin of languages. Today there are over thirty bilingual and multi-lingual states and their number is ever on the increase. These states have solved their language problems according to the principles of inalienable essential rights and the rational universal concepts of political liberty and the Rights of Man. These rights which were more and more clearly defined since the American declaration of Independence and the French Revolution were enunciated in uncompromising terms, for instance in the resolution of the House of Representatives in Massachussets in 1765 :

> " Resolved that inhabitants of this province are unalienably entitled to those essential rights in common with all men ; and that no law of society can, consistent with the law of God and nature, divest them of those rights."

The solution to the language problem is primarily to be sought in the principles of liberty and equality, and cultural autonomy of which language rights are the logical derivatives. Thus Oscar Ianowsky concluded his study on *Nationalities and National Minorities :*

> " We are left no alternative but to incorporate nationalities and national minorities in the structure of the state, with respect for, recognition of and legal protection extended to the pattern of life of every group."

Consonant with the principles of liberty and equality and cultural autonomy the following principles are deduced from the actual working of language rights in bilingual and multilingual countries :

If there be within a country two or more languages spoken by large groups at the time new constitutional laws are being framed, or a new Government alters language policies, these two or more languages are recognised as languages of the State, and have equal national and official status. This principle may be verified in the unitary states of Finland and Belgium and in the Constitutions of Switzerland, Canada, South Africa, Pakistan, India and the U.S.S.R.

The modern tendency in language rights is to give more and more concessions to the languages of groups within a nation. Ceylon is the only country in which an attempt is being made to withdraw and suppress the existing rights of a language. Alfred Cobban points out in his study on *National Self-determination* :

> " Switzerland gets on very well with three—for some purposes four languages ; South Africa and Canada with two. The principle to be followed seems so obvious that one wonders why so much fuss has been made on this matter. If in a State two languages are each used by large sections of the population, then for all common purposes the State must be bilingual and all official business be conducted and recorded in both languages."

A second principle of language rights is the need for one inter-provincial language in a multilingual and multinational state which counts several nationalities and several languages. India has fourteen national and official languages operating in different states and several minor languages—hence the need in India for Hindi or English as an inter-provincial language.

The U.S.S.R. is as large and varied a linguistic mosaic as India with its many constituent states. Hence Russian is a common language for the whole of the U.S.S.R. Similar reasons and the extensiveness of the numerous Islands which form the Republic of Indonesia compelled Indonesia to adopt a common language, the Bhasa Indonesia.

Language has assumed in this twentieth century an importance in the identification and circumscription of culture and nationality which it never had before in the history of States. In earlier times languages were never imposed by coercion upon minorities or upon aliens and it was even fashionable to have a foreign tongue as the language of the courts mainly because of royal marriage and cultural prestige. Thus Italian and Spanish were once fashionable in the French Courts and French was fashionable at the German Courts, as Tamil was during certain periods fashionable at the Courts of the Sinhalese Kings.

But now each nation and each nationality or minority idolises its language and regards it as a symbol of its autonomy and honour, and as the supreme expression of its own personality. The social sciences and psychological research have fully endorsed the importance of language, and hence ours is an age of the use of the mother-tongue in the teaching and practice of religion, of the mother-tongue in education, and of the mother-tongue as the language of the state and of Government.

Such ruthless and cruel imposition of a foreign language by law as happened in Wales, Scotland and Ireland is not possible today, because, with the growth in the definition and understanding of language rights, language tolerance has also been growing. It is even acknowledged that language tolerance is a further advance in human relations and social virtue than religious tolerance, and that conversely language persecution is even more odious and reprehensible than religious persecution.

Says Karl Vossler in *Language and Civilisation* :

"Tolerance of national languages is a still later tenderer flower of human culture. Once that insight has been gained, thereafter intolerance on this point is an even greater idiocy. If I grudge my neighbour his religious beliefs, and hammer my own into his skull, I shall at any rate be able to excuse myself on the ground that

I believe my own to be the only one that leads to salvation, that his leads to damnation, and that I want to save his soul.

"But if I throttled my brother's mother-tongue in order to impose mine on him, what excuse can I have except that of conceit? For my neighbour's language is his inner eye, his form of thought with all its potentialities of expression, his spiritual childhood and future.

To everyone who has understood this, all repressive measures directed against a language must seem like crimes against the budding life of their spirit."[8]

A full, integrated and equal partnership and citizenship and intelligent Tamil participation in Government demands a recognition of Tamil language rights. No State has ever found it of advantage to have a permanently discontented minority within the body politic. The reasonable use of Tamil demands that Tamil also be made a national and official language, and if justice demands that a concession be made to the sentiments of the majority, let Sinhalese be made the first language of the State and Tamil the second language of the State. But let both languages have a national and official status though in function the official use of each language may be restricted to those to whom it is the mother-tongue.

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[8] *Ibid.* p. 156.

The Passionless Passion

(An Interpretation of Certain Decads of the Tiruvacagam)

G. VANMIKANTHAN [1]

"The Perennial Philosophy", says Aldous Huxley, "is primarily concerned with the one divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit. ....In every age there have been some men and women who chose to fulfil the conditions upon which alone, as a matter of brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had ; and of these a few have left accounts of the Reality they were thus enabled to apprehend and have tried to relate, in one comprehensive system of thought, the given facts of this experience with the given facts of their other experiences. To such exponents of the Perennial Philosophy those who know them have generally given them the name of 'saint' or 'prophet', 'sage' or 'enlightened one'."

One of those few is Manikkavacagar. His first hand accounts of the Reality he was 'enabled to apprehend' and of the given facts of this experience are contained as a comprehensive system of thought in the *Tiruvacagam.*

FOUR KANDAMS OF THE TIRUVACAGAM

The *Tiruvacagam* has not been divided into *Kandams* or Books. If one were however to try to do so, it would lend itself to four divisions. The First Book would be

[1] This is the third article on the *Tiruvacagam* by this writer. The first two,—*Verities of Tiruvacagam* and *Manikkavacakopanishad* appeared in *Tamil Culture*, September 1953 and October 1954 respectively.

called 'HIS GLORY GREAT' and would comprise the four *agavals*. "Thy glory great I, man of 'evil deeds', know not how to praise!", bewailed Manikkavacagar; but because He, Civan, within his heart abided, by His grace bowing at His feet, to his heart's delight he sang *Civan's Perenniality without Beginning; Civan's Fame; His Universal Manifestation;* and *The Song of Praise.*

The next book would be THE TEN STEPS,—a manual of instructions for the conquest of the self and the apprehension of the one Reality. The ten steps are:— 1. Discrimination of the Real, 2. Initiation in the Divine Ground, 3. Dying to sense and self, 4. The soul's purification, 5. Rendering a fit return, 6. Cleansing the heart for receiving the Spirit, 7. Overwhelming sense of the Divine Compassion, 8. Mystic Union, 9. Ecstatic Bliss, 10. Overflow of Bliss. These are the ten steps of the *Gnana-marga* shown in the *Tirucchadagam*. They lead to a great victory, but, like all victories, it leaves a gnawing dread of loss in the heart of the victor. An overwhelming sense of unworthiness and a sinking fear of being forsaken are intermingled with the overflow of bliss and evoke a heart-rending entreaty whose burden is 'Forsake-Me-Not'. The decad with this title will also be included in the second book.

The Third Book is the most important of the four books. It shows the way to have and to hold that which had been so laboriously gained by the Ten Steps.

The Lord never forsakes. "This lowly cur by even a whit to forsake is not the Lord's will", declares Manikkavacagar. Whether it is forsaking or being forsaken, the infallible strategy against such a peril is Love. Love unswerving, unflagging, shameless, unremitting and boundless. And selfless.

The Third Book comprising the sixteen decads (padigams) from the *Tiruvempavai* to the *Koil-tiru-p-padigam* is the book of this love,—the PASSIONLESS PASSION.

The Fourth Book comprises the last twenty-nine decads of the *Tiruvacagam,* and is the Book of RAPTUROUS BLISS,—no longer insecure. Love has made it everlasting.

THE PASSIONLESS PASSION

The Third Book is the object of our present study.

Life has been divided in Tamil Literature into two spheres,—the Inner Life and the Outer Life, the subjective and the objective, the female and the male, the life of love and the life of strife.

The literature of the Life of Love has its special grammar and rules. The Life of Love is broadly divided into two sections,—the Secret Courtship, and the Public Declaration and Union. Only two characters hold the stage,—a maiden pining away with a secret passion for an youth and the young man, the object of her love. True to the scarcely admitted but very real characteristic of courtship, it is the maiden who sets her heart on a man and woos him till he is irrevocably hers. Manikkavacagar's Book of Passionless Passion conforms to this tradition but with an unique difference. The seeker after the one Reality is a very love-sick maiden indeed, but with one great difference from her earthy sisters. Her passion, it is true, sears her like a flame, but in the process burns away all the dross of carnal and earthy love. When the chase is over and victory is hers, it is she who, as a supplicant, assures her Beloved thus :—

'*What service Thou demandest, that we shall pay.*'
True love always humbles itself in victory, for love is service. When love humbles itself all desire dies. When desire dies passion becomes passionless. Kothai Nacchiar in a similar context sings,

For ever, for seven and seven births with YOU
United shall we be ; to YOU alone shall we be servitors ;
All our other passions do Thou banish !

THE POWER OF LOVE

Many are the ways by which men seek to gain the one Reality, but in vain. Thus sings Manikkavacagar :—

Brahma went up to seek ; Thou didst hide thyself !
From those who toiled with mystic scrolls didst hide Thyself !
From those who, to the grief of their Kin, sought Thee with single-minded devotion, Thou didst hide Thyself !
From those who, staking their faith in the power of the Vedic Mantras, laboriously sought Thee Thou didst hide Thyself !
From those who boasted to see Thee by some rare device,
By the same device, there,—didst Thou hide thyself !

. . . .
. . . . *Far off*
Bidding the senses five depart,—seeking refuge in trackless hill,
With frames devoid of all but bare breath, spurning all delights,—
Ascetic saints in contemplation dwell ; in (from) their vision Thou didst securely hide Thyself !
Seeming one thing, then not, eluding knowledge, Thou didst hide Thyself !
When e'en of old I strove to find Thee, e'en when today I strive,
Thou didst hide Thyself, Deceiver !

BUT WE HAVE FOUND THEE NOW ![2]

[2] The author of this article begs to acknowledge that he has freely used copious extracts from Rev. G. U. Pope's translation of the *Tiruvacagam* and that he has himself rendered more portions into English. He has taken the liberty of mixing up both. He craves the pardon of all devotees of Pope's version. The only aim has been to give a clear interpretation of Manikkavacagar's thoughts and words. No attempt has been made at versification.

HOW ?

THUS,—(answers Manikkavacagar)

Then, while undying love dissolves my frame,
I cried ;
.... 'twas then through all my limbs
A honied sweetness He infused, and made me
blest.

There is one device He cannot escape, whose lure He cannot resist. He falls into the net of devout love.

Therefore His devotees,

' saints who, abandoning all activities, their
bonds cast off,—in freedom dwell and
everlastingly perceive Him in themselves,
they all have come as maidens with beauteous
dark eyes to worship Him in the manner of
human beings, Him, the Bridegroom of the
awe-inspiring Goddess.'

For the same reason

Said sacred Vishnu and flower-born Brahma as
they gazed
on Civan's form, ' our days in vain we spend
(here)
Without going to earth and being born (as
human beings) ; 'Tis earth
'tis earth alone where Civan's grace is wont
to save ! '

For human beings, then, the way of worship is love, the consecration of oneself as the Lord's Bride,—the *Nayaka-Nayaki bhāvam.*

Manikkavacagar in his own behalf and in behalf of all of us becomes the Lord's Bride and in this third book of his great work dances step by step into the Lord's heart till both hearts beat as one, and in fact there is none but ONE.

SECTION I

LOVE CHERISHED IN SECRET

We shall take one poem from each of the sixteen decads of this Book and trace the birth, growth and consummation of this Passionless Passion of the Lord's Bride.

She has hardly entered her teens. But she has already fallen in love with Madevan. She has not confided in any-one. But her companions always agog for a toothy bit of gossip have divined her secret. They come to her doors loudly singing the praises of Madevan. She is in that state of ecstatic love when even the mention of her lover's name sends a thrill through every fibre of her body. As soon as the strains of the song of Madevan reaches her ears she falls into a swoon.

She had, however, through sheer exuberance of love, on occasions given away her secret. Her words are now used by her companions to torment her. She pretends absolute unconcern and would not accompany her friends to Madevan's shrine. She is pestered to join in singing His praises. She cannot trust herself to do so without altogether betraying her secret. But her friends are importunate. " You alone are fit to do so, do therefore in rapture melt and sing for us and all the world,—sing a song of thy Lord ", beseeches one companion, while another entreats her to sing of Him " Who from time everlasting is the First of Beings and the Only-One."

(i)

HOW INDEED COULD ONE PRAISE HIM ?

Willing yet unwilling, eager yet hesitant, she finds an excuse in His immeasurable greatness and turns on her companions with the impatient question,—' How indeed could one praise Him ? ' For,

Far beneath the seven nether regions
and ineffable are His blossom feet!
His flower-laden crown is all knowledge's end!
A lady by him is His form, but not the only one!
Though the Vedas, the heaven dwellers and all the world sing His praises,
Praises fall short of him, our unique companion, dweller in His devotees.
Therefore, O Ye of blameless lineage,
handmaidens of Haran's shrine,
What is His city? His name? who His kin? who are not?
How sing we His praise?

—*Tiruvempavai*, 10.

(ii)

Nevertheless His Form will I sing

Her companions would not be put off. 'O beauteous gazelle, sing His Feet, the source of grace', they beseeched her. And she sang. Over feature after feature of His face and form she dwelt with loving reminiscence and sang to her heart's rejoicing.

The fragmentary moon adorning her Lord's head is the first feature which comes to her mind. Its cool brilliance is ever present before her eyes. It is one insignia which none else has a right to wear. It is His sole prerogative. How many times without number has she seen it on hill tops and in the valleys as He went about His domain. When He sped to her in the gloaming darkness to keep the tryst, as He wended His way down the hill through winding paths and even pathless ways, the crescent moon flashed in and out of the latticed foliage, now far, now near, but ever assuring her of His presence and speedy coming. If for a brief moment for what seemed like eternity—this

beacon of joy was hid from her eyes while perhaps He pushed way through aisled courses of mountain streams, she could still always hear Him. He delighted in singing the enthralling sonorous chants of the Sama-Veda. Even while she went about the day's chores under the stern eyes of her mother her ears would keep eternal commune with Him.

Lost in the reverie of these delights of the eye and the ear she forgot her fears, she forgot her companions, she forgot everything except her Beloved. With a secret joy suffusing her young face, with shining eyes searching the expanse of the hills before her for the flash of the crescent moon in the misty morning, with ears deaf to all sounds but the strains of His music, she lifted her voice and sang. Her companions and the world itself were silenced into amazed wonderment.

> HE WITH THE CRESCENT MOON, THE BARD OF THE VEDAS, LORD OF THIS VAST DOMAIN,
> DONNING THE TWISTED THREAD, ON STATELY STEED HE RIDES.
> DUSKY IS HIS THROAT, RED-GOLDEN HIS FORM, ASHES WHITE THEREON.
> FIRST IN ALL WORLDS IS HE : BLISS UNCEASING,—
> THE TRADITIONAL BOON—TO HIS VETERAN DEVOTEES HE GIVES.
> THAT ALL THE WORLD AMAZED BE, LET ME BEHOLDING HIM SING !
>
> —*Tiru-Ammanai*, 9.

(iii)

TWO AND TWO MAKE ONE

She has irrevocably lost her heart to him. "My love is to Paranjoti" she blurts out. She unceasingly thinks, dreams, speaks of Him alone. She loves to lisp His names, all of her own secret christening. *Atthan*, *Anandan*, *Amudan*, she would roll these names round her tongue,

tasting them like sweets till their honied sweetness melted and filled her mouth. But He was still a riddle to her. He seemed now this, now that, always paradoxical pairs of opposites. Her heart was sore puzzled as He eluded her understanding. Now singing of Him, feature by loved feature, her puzzlement increases till she can bear it no longer and must confide in her companions. Even as the words issue haltingly out of her sweet lips the riddle is solved and her heavy clouded heart is illumined by divine understanding. Realisation of His catalystic quality comes to her in one inspired illumined flash. For when He enters (the heart) as the Lord of Love, He

Melts the very bones, renders the two-fold
deeds (karma) powerless;
Weeds out the rooted griefs, purifies
(her sense of) dualities,
So that all that has gone before perish entire.

So she exultingly sings,

FOR HIM WHO IS THE VEDAS AND SACRIFICES TOO;
FOR HIM WHO IS THE REAL AND UNREAL AS WELL;
FOR HIM WHO IS THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND
IGNORANCE DARK BESIDES;
FOR HIM WHO IS SORROW AND BLISS TOO;
FOR HIM WHO IS THE HALF, WHO IS THE
WHOLE AS WELL;
FOR HIM WHO IS BONDAGE AND THE LIBERATION;
FOR HIM WHO IS THE FIRST AND THE LAST;
FOR HIS ANOINTMENT POUND WE THE
GOLDEN PASTE.

—*Tiru-p-porchunnam*, 20.

(iv)

HIS INFINITE CONDESCENDING GRACE

Immediately a sense of her utter unworthiness assails her. Simultaneously, wonder at her good fortune and gratitude to Him for His infinite grace overwhelms her.

She realises only too well that her love cannot stand comparison with Kannappan's immeasurable love. But with a wry humour she sees that she is also beyond comparison, if only for her mite of a love. No one could have less. Forthwith her heart swells with joy and she sings,

> LOVE LIKE KANNAPPAN'S HE DID NOT FIND IN ME,
> YET MY SIRE, BY MY OWN MEASURE, ME TOO GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTED,
> AND CEREMONIOUSLY COMMANDED ME, 'COME HITHER': TO THAT FLOOD OF GRACE,
> HIM WITH THE GOLDEN FORM ASH COVERED,
> GO HUM YOUR SONG, O KING OF BEES (MY HEART).
>
> —*Tiru-k-kotthumbi*, 4.

(v)

THE MEETING

She had so long worshipped Him from afar. Just a glimpse of the flashing crescent moon; His sweet voice wafted in the wind; a blue patch on His throat, black against the golden and white skin; glimpses of these are her only acquaintance with Him. Even so, she had lost her heart to Him and had never thereafter even a fleeting glance for anyone else. All she has seen so far of Him were as good as not having seen Him. Now she is to meet Him. She meets Him face to face. Just as Sita, the while she feigned to trim her bangles, stole a glance at Rama and shed her doubts, assured that he who stood before her was the same one whom she had seen from her balcony and had lost her heart to, similarly our Lord's bride receives confirmation and sings,

> THE LORD OF THIS BEAUTIFUL VAST DOMAIN,[3] AFTER HE SEVERED
> THE ROOT OF MY BIRTH'S SEEDLING, ON NONE ELSE HAVE I SET EYES:

[3], [4] The references to the Vast Domain and the City are to God without and God within; the vast domain being the worlds upon worlds and the city being the city of the heart. This will be clear from the succeeding two sections.

FORMLESS (THEN), NOW A FORM HE WEARS.
SINGING
THE BEAUTIFUL CITY[4] HE GRACES, LET US ACCLAIM
THIS CLEAR CONFIRMATION.[5]
.. —*Tiru-t-tellenam,* 2.

(vi)

GOD WITHOUT

Aldous Huxley in his *Perennial Philosophy* says,

> "THAT ART THOU': 'Behold but One in all things'—God within and God without. There is a way to Reality in and through the soul, and there is a way to Reality in and through the world. Whether the ultimate goal can be reached by following either of the ways to the exclusion of the other is to be doubted. The third, best and hardest way is that which leads to the divine Ground simultaneously in the perceiver and in that which is perceived."

Our Lord's bride can but choose the 'best and hardest' way and therefore she beholds God without and God within. With awe she looks at His vast domain and beholds God without,—Him whom Manikkavacagar elsewhere hails thus:—

Permeating all things, each one He cherishes,
behold Him!

Our Lord's bride proclaims this in song thus:—

WHAT HE SMEARS IS WHITE ASH; WHAT HE WEARS
IS AN ANGRY SNAKE;
WHAT HE SPEAKS WITH HIS LIPS DIVINE IS THE
MYSTIC WORD, IT SEEMS, MY DEAR!
WHAT MATTERS WHAT HE SMEARS, WHAT HE SAYS,
WHAT HE WEARS?
THE LORD, OF ALL THAT HATH LIFE THE ESSENCE
IS HE!
—*Tirucchalal,* 1.

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5 ஏணம் = certainty, confirmation.
தெள் = clear, devoid of doubt.

(vii)

God Within

"Though God is everywhere present," says William Law (quoted by Aldous Huxley in his '*Perennial Philosophy*'), "yet He is only present to thee in the deepest and most central part of thy soul. The natural senses cannot possess God or unite thee to Him; nay, thy inward faculties of understanding, will and memory can only reach after God, but cannot be the place of His habitation in thee. But there is a root or depth of thee from where all these faculties come forth, as lines from a centre,[6] or as branches from the body of a tree. This depth is called the centre, the fund or the bottom of the soul. This depth is the unity, the eternity—I had almost said the infinity—of thy soul; for it is so infinite that nothing can satisfy it or give it rest but the infinity of God."

"God within and God without," goes on Aldous Huxley to explain,—"these are two abstract notions which can be entertained by the understanding and expressed in words. But the facts to which these notions refer cannot be realised and experienced except in 'the deepest and most central part of the soul.' And this is true no less of God without than of God within."

Accordingly the Lord's bride proceeds to realise no less God without than God within in the deepest and most central part of her soul. Hence her song:—

(After) many a day praising Him and serving
Him, His blossom feet,
In my heart He planted, the Great One;
and as beauteous flame,
Tearing the fibres of my heart, He took me
under His sway. His twin feet
Golden became. This let us sing and
pluck flowers (for Him)!

—*Tiru-p-poovalli*, 9.

[6] The Mundaka Upanishad says, "Where the arteries of the body are brought together like the spokes in the centre of the wheel, within it (this self moves about) becoming manifold."

(viii)

HIS PROWESS

Realising God within and God without in the deepest and most central part of her soul, she sings His great prowess.

TWO ARROWS WE SAW NOT—IN EKAMBAR'S HAND !
ONE ARROW—THREE CITIES !—JUMP FOR JOY !
AND ONE WAS TOO MANY !—JUMP FOR JOY !

(ix)

OPEN AVOWAL

Thus her passion progresses, grows, fills her being and can no longer be contained in secrecy. 'Posing as one moved by compassion, He has entered her heart and enslaved her, and has made her the target of public slander.' The point of no return has been crossed. Her plight overpowers her reticence and modesty and impels her to rush into the presence of her Beloved to shamelessly declare her passion, unmindful of the assemblage round Him. She rushes in, dancing in ecstatic joy and longingly sinks her glance on His shoulders. So unbecoming of a modest demure maiden. Utterly shameless, senseless baring of her heart-locked secret. But she could not help it. Her love would not be contained any longer. She need not speak. Her immodest stare speaks volumes. Elsewhere Manikkavacagar sings,

Enter shall I,—mine alone are Thy sacred feet :
standing amidst saints that adore Thee I
Shall laugh, staring at Thy familiar[7] shoulder,[8]
me an immodest cur !

---

7 familiar : the shoulders in which she has, in their secret trysts, often nestled her head.

8 Kamban's readers will recall to memory these lines of his :
"The pair of lances called her (Sita's) glance
Sank deep in shoulders broad of handsome Ram."
—Balakandam, Padalam 10, verse 37.

Here the Lord's bride sings with utter abandon.

> PRIDE WE HAVE LOST, WISDOM WE HAVE FORGOT, YE MAIDENS FAIR !
> WE THINK BUT OF THE CINTURED FEET OF HIM, LORD OF THE SOUTH,
> WHOM HEAVEN ADORES ! THE RAPTUROUS DANCER'S GRACE IF WE OBTAIN,
> HIS SLAVES,—FORTHWITH IN RAPTURE LOST, SHALL WE DANCE GAZING ON HIS SHOULDERS !
>
> —*Tiru-t-tolnokkam*, 8.

Thus every true lover of God has to publicly proclaim his love so that his passion may be purified and transformed into Passionless Passion. Manikkavacagar relates the experience of this transformation in the last poem of this decad thus :—

> *Let us sing*
> *Of the ineffable Inner Light,—the Most Mighty entering my heart ;*
> *Of the crossing of the shoreless vast Sea of Lust ;*
> *Of the headlong flight of the craving senses' vultures, robbed of their prey ;*
> *Of the destruction of their eyrie too !*

(x)

SWING YE LOW, SWING YE HIGH

The point of no return has been crossed. A new fear assails her now. She sinks into despair. Will He accept her or spurn her and her love ? Her heart reassures her. 'Fear not, He will assuredly accept you', says the heart. What will be the sign ? He will sever the cycle of Death and Birth. Reassured, she and her heart swing in delirious joy and sing :—

> HIS THROAT THE POISON HOLDS ; LORD OF THE HEAVENLY ONES ;
> FROM UTTARA-KOCA-MANGAI'S GEM-LIKE CLOUD CAPPED MANSION

He will come with her whose words are music; and in His slaves'
Hearts take abode: elixir of deathlessness will well up (in our hearts) as He in His grace
Sunders (the bonds of) death and birth. Let us His holy praises sing,
O ye who wear rows of bracelets white! and swing in the golden swing!

—*Tiru-p-ponnoosal*, 4.

Here ends the Secret Courtship.

Section II

PUBLIC DECLARATION AND UNION

(xi)

Declaration

Their love has become the talk of the whole town. It cannot be very long before the mother of the Lord's bride comes to hear of it. Before this happens she must be told, she must be confided in, her blessings, her invaluable wisdom, understanding and help should be secured. The Lord's bride therefore seeks her mother when she is alone. Tongue-tied, guilty, shame and shyness two shakles on her feet, she is driven forward by love and sheer necessity. As she nears her mother, she rushes forward and in a sudden close embrace buries her face in her mother's ample bosom, and between muffled sobs cries 'Mother!'

Eternal bridegroom, the utterly beautiful;
Since He fills her heart she could only cry 'Mother!'
He who dwells in her heart,—the Southerner, the vast domain's
Lord—since He is bliss, she could only cry 'Mother!'

—*Annai-p-patthu*, 3.

(xii)

INVITATION

Though she only cried 'Mother' and would say nothing else, her mother, a person of perfect understanding, divined her daughter's secret and bade her send for Him. The Lord's bride rushes out in great joy to entreat the *Kuyil*, lovers' winged messenger, to call Him hither. She begs the *Kuyil*,

> THOU KUYIL SMALL, THAT DOST FREQUENT THE GROVE WITH HONEY-SWEET FRUIT RICH, PAY HEED TO THIS !
> THE BOUNTEOUS LORD, WHO SPURNING THE HEAVENS, ENTERED THIS EARTH, AND MADE MEN HIS OWN ;
> THE ONLY-ONE WHO DISREGARDING THE FLESH ENTERED MY HEART AND MY SENTIENT LIFE BECAME ;—
> THE BRIDEGROOM OF HER WHO WON HIM WITH GENTLE EYES THAT EXCEL THE FAWN'S,—GO THOU AND BID HIM COME HITHER !

—*Kuyil-patthu*, 4.

(xiii)

STATE ARRIVAL

He comes. He comes in state and she would proclaim His heraldry ; but in His presence she becomes tongue-tied. But her mother and her people should know His Name and fame ; His kingdom, capital, river and range ; His steed and arms ; His war-drum and favourite flower, and His banner. She therefore turns to her loquacious

9 "For my part," says St. Bernard (quoted by Aldous Huxley in his '*Perennial Philosophy*') "I think the chief reason which prompted the invisible God to become visible in the flesh and to hold concourse with men was to lead carnal men who are able to love only carnally, to the healthful love of His flesh, and afterwards, little by little, to spiritual love."

parrot to whom on many a lonesome wistful night she had repeated item by loved item His sweet Name and proud fame, and begs the bird to announce Him.

She would not, however, have her mother and kinsmen think that she had taught the parrot His Name. "Speak His Name," she commands the bird, "recollecting what you have heard Brahma and Vishnu address Him."

> PARROT FAIR AND YOUNG ! RECOLLECT AND TELL THE RENOWNED SACRED NAME
> OF OUR LORD OF VAST DOMAIN,—'AROORAN', 'SEMPERUMAN',
> OR AS YOU HAVE HEARD BRAHMA AND VISHNU SAY,—
> 'MILORD', 'OVERLORD OF THE GODS'!
>
> —*Tiru-t-tasangam*, 1.

(xiv)

HE IS ARISEN IN ME

Aldous Huxley quotes the following extracts in his 'Perennial Philosophy';

> "Goodness[10] needeth not to enter into the soul, for it is there already, only it is unperceived."
>
> —*The Theologica Germanica.*

> "When the Ten Thousand things are viewed in their oneness, we return to the Origin and remain where we have always been."
>
> —*Sen T'sen.*

and proceeds to explain as follows :—

> "It is because we don't know Who we are, because we are unaware that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, that we behave in the ...... ways that are so characteristically human. We are saved, we are liberated and enlightened, by perceiving the hitherto unperceived good

10 same as Godness.

> that is already within us, by returning to our eternal Ground and remaining where, without knowing it, we have always been."

Immediately on the advent of the Beloved, the Lord's bride experiences this same revelation (which Aldous Huxley speaks of) and communicates it to her people. Him whom she could describe so far in vague phrases only—such as 'the flavour of the fruit', or 'nectar', or 'lo, it is difficult to apprehend', or 'O, it is so simple', or 'even the immortals know it not',—she could now with assurance affirm, "THIS IS HE, THIS HIS BEAUTIFUL FORM". She has realised in herself the Truth in the doctrine, '*Tat twam asi*'—'That art Thou'. She has gained the unitive knowledge of the divine Ground. Therefore she sings,

> 'THE FLAVOUR OF THE FRUIT IS THAT';
> 'AMBROSIA THAT';
> 'THAT CAN RARELY BE KNOWN'; 'SO ACCESSIBLE (STILL)'! THUS IMMORTALS TOO KNOW NOT!
> O DWELLER IN UTTARA-KOCA-MANGAI'S SWEET PERFUMED GROVES!
> WHO HAST ASSUMED SWAY OVER US AND HAST IN THY GRACE COME HITHER
> THAT WE MAY DECLARE, 'THIS IS HIS SACRED FORM, THIS IS HE';
> WHAT IS THY WILL FOR OUR SERVICE? THAT WE SHALL HEED.
> OUR MIGHTY LORD, ARISE IN US.

(xv)

SHOW ME A SIGN

All saints, prophets, sages, enlightened ones have all down the ages received a sign,—a proof of the apprehension of the one Reality. Rev. Pope translates the sub-title of this decad as 'Eternal Reality'. For the sign is the seal of a covenant, it is the dispeller of the dread of being

forsaken, it is the conferment of the Eternal Reality. The Lord's Bride also asks for a sign.

> THE MISTRESS[11] DWELLS IN MIDMOST OF THYSELF ;
> WITHIN THE MISTRESS CENTRED DWELLEST THOU ;
> O OUR PRIMAL LORD WHOSE BEING KNOWS NO END ;
> WHO DWELLEST IN THE SACRED GOLDEN HALL (OF MY HEART) !
> MIDST OF THY SERVANT IF BOTH YE DWELL,
> EVER GIVE ME THY SERVANT THE GRACE
> AMIDST THY LOWLIEST SERVANTS TO ABIDE ;—
> THAT MY HEART'S PURPOSE BE FULFILLED.
>
> —*Koil-mootha-tiru-p-padigam,* 1.

(xvi)

DYING TO SELF

The consummation of the Passionless Passion is the consumation of the self. This is the law to which saints all over the world and all down the ages have borne testimony, as the following extracts (quoted by Aldous Auxley in his '*Perennial Philosophy*') will show.

> *The Beloved is all in all ; the lover merely veils Him ;*
> *The Beloved is all that lives, the lover a dead thing.*
>
> —Jalal-uddin-Rumi.

> *My Me is God, nor do I recognise any other*
> *Me except my God Himself.*
>
> —St. Catherine of Genoa.

Our Lord's Bride 'dies to her self' singing thus :—

> THIS DAY IN GRACE TO ME, THOU RISEST IN MY HEART—
> A SUN BIDDING THE DARKNESS FLEE !
> ON THIS THY NATURE MANIFEST I THOUGHT TILL ALL THOUGHT CEASED TO BE.[12]

11 Divine Grace.

12 Thinking is a sign of separateness, of duality.

THINE 'NONE-BUT-THYNESS'
GOES FORTH, GOES FORTH (INTO ALL THINGS) AS ATOM BY INFINITESIMAL ATOM TILL THOU ALONE ART:
O, CIVAN WHO DWELLEST IN THE VAST DOMAIN,
THOU ART NOT ONE, THOU APART NONE ART!
WHO CAN INDEED KNOW THEE?[13]

—*Koil-tiru-p-padigam*, 7.

Manikkavacagar thus loved and gained the Lord, and he has bequeathed to us his first-hand accounts of the one Reality which he was able to apprchend. Let us be worthy of this priceless heritage and through his blessings become loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit so that we too may be possessed by this Passionless Passion and die to our self to become alive to the Kingdom of God within us, where, without knowing it, we have always been.[14]

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[13] The answer is not 'none', but 'I know Thee'. For the *Kena Upanishad* says, "To whomsoever It (the Brahman) is not known, to him It is known; to whomsoever It is known, he does not know. It is not understood by those who understand It; It is understood by those who do not understand It."

Please also refer to the quotations from William Law and Aldous Huxley under the section 'God within' regarding the futility of understanding etc. as aids for possessing God.

[14] This article is humbly dedicated to Shri V. Subbarayar of Matunga, Bombay, a nectarine ocean of intuitive knowledge of the *Tiruvacagam*, of the waters of which it was given to this writer to take but a sip-much less indeed.

The Development of Tamilian Religious Thought

SWAMI VIPULANANDA*

I

INTRODUCTORY

The beginnings of Tamilian civilisation may be traced far back to the ancient days, when the waters of the Pahruli river brought fertility to the regions that extended southwards beyond Kumari (the present Cape Comorin). The Pandya king, Ma Kirti, at whose court the Tholkappiyam was published flourished before the time of the great deluge [1] which submerged several ranges of hills, the river Pahruli and the forty-nine countries adjoining it. The waters of the Indian Ocean roll over the spot where the proud city of Kavadapuram [2] stood. This city of great wealth, 'rich in gold, celestial and adorned with pearls and gems', was the second capital city of the Pandyan kingdom; the original seat of government, Thenmadura, was situated further south and was swallowed up by the sea at the end of the first Oozhi. The commentator Nacchinarkiniyar ascribed to King Ma Kirti [3] a long reign of twenty-four thousand years and proceeds to say that the scholars at this old king's court were, therefore, men of matchless wisdom. If years mean anything, Ma Kirti and his courtiers should certainly be the possessors of very ripe wisdom. Never-

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1 *Chilappadikaram* XI, 17-22; *Kali-thokai* CIV 1-4; *Tholkappiyam*; Payiram Comm.; Karpiyal 4 Comm., and Marapiyal 94 Comm., *Purananuru* VI, 2 and IX, 11.

2 Valmiki *Ramayanam*, Kishkindakandam, XLI, 19.

3 *Tholkappiyam*: Payiram Comm.

the-less we, who belong to a short-lived race of mortals, whose average span of life does not exceed the proverbial three score years and ten, refuse to see eye to eye with Nacchinarkiniyar, when he makes this pre-diluvian monarch go through the dull routine of a king's life for such a long number of years. Although the tradition may be unacceptable for purposes of historical investigation, it may not be uninteresting to seek for and discover its origin. The existence of parallel traditions in Sumerian history suggests the possibility of a common source. The king lists[4] of Larsa give the names of eight kings before the deluge who reigned for periods ranging between 18,600 and 43,200 years. The civilisation of the Mesopotamian valley has a special interest to students of Tamil culture, for the ancient Sumerians are said to bear most resemblance to the Dravidian ethnic type of India.[5] The discovery of monuments[6] belonging to the First Dynasty of Ur (3100-2930 B.C.), the third after the Flood, has proved to a certain extent that the records left by the scribes of ancient Sumer are not altogether legendary. The archacological finds at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro may throw fuller light on the racial and cultural connexions of the Sumerians and the ancient Dravidians, and the antiquity of the Sumero-Dravidian civilisation. The account given by Berosus[7] in the third or fourth century before Christ appears to suggest that the early settlers of Sumer arrived by sea, bringing with them a fully developed civilisation. This civilisation may possibly have arisen in the submerged Tamil lands that extended to the south of Kumari.

Coming back to the court of King Ma Kirti, we see Tholkappiyar seated in the midst of an assembly of learned pandits, expounding his immortal treatise. Opposite to him sits Athankottasan, a relentless critic, who, at the instigation of the sage Agattiyar (Sanskrit-Agastya), points out many flaws in the book. Tholkappiyar successfully

4, 5, 6, 7 C. L. Wolley: *The Sumerians* (Oxford) pages 21, 30, 187 and 189; H. R. Hall: *The Ancient History of the Near East* (Methuen) pages 173, 174 and 177.

meets the points raised by Athankottasan and the book receives the approbation of the wise men of Ma Kirti's court. From thenceforward the *Tholkappiyam* becomes the most authoritative treatise on Tamil language and Tamil culture. From internal evidence, one is led to believe that the book was written at a time when the Aryan culture was just beginning to influence the social and religious life of the ancient Tamilians. Nacchinarkiniyar says that the *Tholkappiyam* existed before the time of Vyasa,[8] the compiler of the Vedas and the author of the *Mahabharata.* The high standard of excellence reached by the book shows that the Tamils at this time were a highly civilized people. The sage Agattiyar came into a land which was civilized and wealthy. There are a good many legends centering round the name of this sage. He is said to have started from the Meru ; passing through Dwarapathi (Dwarasamudram), he proceeded southwards with a band of followers until he reached Tamilakam. After his arrival, the Pothiya[9] hill, where he fixes up his abode becomes as famous as the Himalayas, the Kaviri[10] river (Cauvery) which is said to have originated from his water-pot becomes the sacred Ganges of the South ; Kanta-man,[11] the Chola king, who sought his protection is saved from the murderous battleaxe of Parasurama, the protagonist of priestly power ; the mighty Ravana[12] crosses the sage's path and becomes subdued (literally bound) not by force of arms, but by the subtler persuasive power of music. The sage is said to have spent years in the island of Ceylon, practising severe austerities. Later he becomes deified and we see temples erected to him in far-off Java. This half-mythical figure stands in the hoary past as the synthesis of two great cultures, the Aryan and the Dravidian, which like the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna was to progress ever afterwards as an undivided single life-giving current.

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8 *Tholkappiyam*: Payiram Comm.
9 *Chilappadikaram* I, 14 ; III, 1 ; VIII, 8 ; XV, 14 : XXVII, 67.
10 *Manimekhalai,* Padikam 12.
11 *Manimekhalai,* XXII, 35.
12 *Tholkappiyam*: Payiram Comm.

The earliest existing literary records of Tamilakam are to be found among the anthologies known as the Sangam classics. Rescued from palm-leaf manuscripts and brought to light during the last three or four decades, these anthologies open up an entirely new world, entering into which one meets with a god-like race of men and women, strong in physique, possessed of a keen intellect, proud, valiant, active and energetic. They appear to have given little or no thought to metaphysical speculations. Life in those remote times was strenuous and the hero, who won renown by steady perseverance and indomitable courage, either in the battle-field or in the more peaceful avocations of life, was held up as the ideal to be followed. He, whose valour was sung by bards here on earth, was sure of mounting the celestial car, which carried the soul in its ascent to the abode of the Immortals.[13] This earliest epoch in the civilisation of the Tamils is the age in which Heroism was exalted to the position of a religion. The acquisition of fame was held up as the motive for virtuous action and the performance of strenuous deeds of valour.

The War-God Muruga, ruddy-complexioned, resembling the sun at dawn, was worshipped from the earliest times as the ideal of unfailing Achievement.[14] His mother, the great Goddess, whom the Tamilian soldiers invoked in the field of battle was known as Korravai,[15] the Victorious One. Even in those early days, there were philosophers, Arivar, who by years of mental discipline had attained intuitive insight into the past, the present and the future ; and there were also anchorites, Thapathar who performed severe austerities ; the Arivar and the Thapathar having the attainment of Truth as the sole aim of life worshipped Shiva, the unborn, the embodiment of Truth.[16] To those who shrank from the path of Truth, the God of Truth appeared as the God of Wrath and Destruction. Mayon,

13 *Purananuru*, XXVII, 7-9.
14 *Purananuru*, LVI, 14.
15 See *Tholkappiyam* Purattinai Iyal and *Purapporul-venba-malai*.
16 *Paripadal*. V. 33.

the blue-complexioned, was the embodiment of Fame.[17] His brother, Valiyon, whose complexion was as white as a conch-shell, was the personification of undisputed Strength.[18] Indra and Varuna ranked only as demi-gods. It is said that the Chola King, Thodi-thol-chempian,[19] went as an ally of the king of the celestials and broke down the three hanging fortresses of the Asuras. In sealing a bond of friendship, the king of the celestials agreed to visit the Chola capital once a year and participate in the great festival which was held in his honour for eight and twenty days. This was the origin of the Indravila. Mention is made of a Pandya king Vadimp-alamba-minra-pandyan who instituted a festival in honour of the Sea-god.[20] One of his descendants not only discarded this festival but also hurled a lance of defiance at the Sea-god, whereupon the enraged sea[21] swept away the Pahruli river, several ranges of hills and a goodly portion of the Pandya dominions. The undaunted Pandya marched northwards and conquered new lands to make up for the loss he had sustained. Old King Ma Kirti[22] defied the very gods and looked upon them as mere quarrelsome children. Once when he heard that hostilities were about to break out between the Devas and the Asuras, he interposed and asked them to lay down their arms and added the threat that if either party were to resort to acts of violence, his strong right arm would smite down the miscreants. The threat went home and both parties slunk away in terror from the presence of the mighty monarch. These legends help us to gain some insight into the ideals and aspirations that stirred the heart of the old Tamil warrior.

Paripadal, one of the Sangam anthologies, makes mention of the Vedic pantheon[23] of gods, such as the twelve

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17 *Puram,* LVI, 13.
18 *Puram,* LVI, 12.
19 *Manimekhalai* I, 4-10.
20 *Puram,* IX, 10.
21 *Chilappadikaram* XI, 17-22.
22 Iraiyanar *Akapporul Sutra,* 35 Comm.
23 *Paripadal* III, 6-8 ; VIII, 4-8.

Adityas, the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras and the twin Asvini-devas; but the worship of these deities had not yet taken root among the mass of the people. Some of the kings were persuaded to perform Vedic sacrifices, which they did more for the purpose of winning earthly renown than for the achieving of heavenly rewards. One of the Pandya kings, Muthu-kudumi Peru Vazhuthi, who lived before the time of the submergence of the Pahruli river, had the distinguishing epithet of Pal-yaga-salai, which means the possessor of many sacrificial halls and another Chola king is known as Peru-nar-killi who performed the Rajasuya sacrifice. Early Aryan thought appears to have been introduced into Tamilakam with Vedic ritualism.

The *Tholkappiyam* and the *Paripadal* make incidental mention of the early speculations concerning the Universe, man's place in it and the ultimate destiny of humanity. The Sankhya system of philosophy was in vogue from very early times; attention, however, does not appear to have been centred round the study of philosophy, until the coming of the Jains and Buddhists. Within a century or two after the time of their illustrious founders, these great religions appear to have been introduced into Tamilakam. Somewhere about this time, there appeared on the firmament of Tamilakam a star of the first magnitude which continues to shed its lustre even to this day. Tiruvalluvar, whose name is known to all parts of the civilized world, and whose teachings have lent a unique grandeur to the language in which they were uttered, lived in an age of great intellectual activity. The ferment, introduced by the great heresies of Jainism and Buddhism, made the exponents of Vaidika Dharma to revalue the traditional teachings and to formulate a course of conduct which, while remaining within the established tenets of the ancient Dharma, would also appeal to those who would not accept the authority of the Vedas. The Universal gospel of Tiruvalluvar met this demand and has ever since been acclaimed as the Uttara Veda.

When Buddhism and Jainism were first introduced, they were considered merely as systems of thought and were received with open arms. The disciplined life of the monk and the self-sacrifice shown by him may have appealed to the hardy Tamil warrior. The old soldier, who might have grown world-weary of the endless number of battles he was called upon to fight, may have found a calm refuge in the seclusion of monasteries. Those who suffered great bereavements, such as the fathers of Kovalan and Kannaki, entered the monasteries to pass the last days of their lives. Princes of the royal blood, such as Ilanko-adikal, embraced a life of poverty to follow the example of the noble ascetic, the scion of the Sakya clan. Along with Buddhism and Jainism, the Nyaya and Vaiseshika philosophies were introduced into Tamilakam. In those remote times, the Mimamsa system does not appear to have been divided into the Purva and the Uttara Mimamsas. Lokayata (materialism), Buddhism, the Sankhya, the Nyaya, the Vaiseshika and the Mimamsa systems are known as the six systems of philosophy in the time of the *Manimekhalai.*[24] A great impetus was given to the cultivation of learning and some of the Tamilian Buddhist scholars went to China, Tibet and the island of Java carrying with them the torch of knowledge. Mention is made in the *Manimekhalai* of the famous Buddhist teacher, Ara-vana-adikal. The name may be translated into Sanskrit as Dharma-swarupa. He is the hero of the epic, as much as his disciple, the Bhikshuni Manimekhalai, is the heroine. The fact that he was extremely aged is mentioned in several places in the poem. The force of his personality appears to have gained many adherents to the path of Buddhism. Later on Buddhism and Jainism gained ground to such an extent that they gave up the spirit of toleration which characterized them at the beginning and became aggressive religions. They aimed at the conversion of the whole of Tamilakam and attempted to do this by winning over the exclusive patronage of princes and scholars. After the destruction

24 *Manimekhalai* XXVII.

of Pukar (Kavirippumpattinam), which event took place somewhere about the end of the second century, the Chola capital is transferred to Uraiyur. Madura suffers from a severe drought and famine for twelve years. The poets of the Sangam disperse and the glories of the good old days become a mere memory of the past. Several Northern dynasties, that cast covetous eyes upon the wealth of Tamilakam, find an opportune moment to gain a foothold in the South ; an Aryan expeditionary force from the North appears to have invaded Tamilakam as early as the time of the Pandya king mentioned in the *Chilappadikaram*. This invasion was successfully resisted and the king is, therefore, known to history as Arya-padai-kadantha Neduncheliyan. Subsequently, the Aryan hordes make a clean sweep of the country and in the next century we see Pallava kings well-established in Kanchi. The Chola and the Pandya dynasties suffer a temporary eclipse and the whole country passes through a period of transition, at the end of which, we find that the North had achieved a cultural conquest even more pronounced than the political conquest. The very names of the Pandya and Chola kings become Sanskritized.

It was during this time, perhaps by the end of the third century or a little earlier, that the Yoga system of philosophy began to appear in Tamilakam. Tradition says that Patanjali lived at Chidambaram and wrote his commentary on Panini's grammar, a treatise on medicine, his immortal treatise on Yoga and the Tantric rules for the worship of Nataraja. The sage is represented as a Naga and is considered as an incarnation of Sesha Naga. This seems to suggest that the theory and practice of Yoga were developed among the ancient Nagas. Patanjali's name is coupled with that of Vyagrapada, another sage, who is said to have arrived at Chidambaram earlier. This sage is represented with eyes in his toes. Is he to be identified with Akshapada, the father of Nyaya Sastra ? These two sages are said to be the first to witness the cosmic dance of

Nataraja. The account may be symbolic of the fact that the supreme truth of the Shaiva religion can only be discerned by the combined eyes of Yoga and Nyaya. By saying so, we do not in the least deny, the historicity of the two sages mentioned above. The Agamic cult of worship, which probably existed as a secret cult from early times, was elaborated during this period. It was certainly enriched by the influx of Tantric thought from the North. The worship of Ganesha, the elephant-headed God, whose form is that of the Pranava mantra is recognised in the Yoga system.

Yoga and Tantra engaged the attention of Siddhars and recluses. Before they could filter down to the mass of the people, it was necessary that the doctrines taught by them should be actualized in the lives of one or more saintly personages. Karaikkal Ammaiyar or Karaikkal Pei (the demoness of Karaikkal), as she called herself, was blessed with a vision of the mystic dance at Tiruvalangadu, and having the gift of song, she has sung in immortal verse the glory of the vision that was vouchsafed unto her ; the first Alwars of Vaishnavism were probably contemporaries of Karaikkal Ammaiyar. Cholan Chenganan, the builder of many temples, also probably lived about this time. In the middle of the seventh century came Tirugnana Sambandhar, the child-saint of Shiyali, who in his third year was blessed with the Divine vision and from thence-forward looked upon Shiva and Parvati as his parents. The saintly old Appar, who in his young days entered a Jain monastery and later on embraced Shaivaism, is a contemporary of Sambandhar. Many sects[25] of Shaivaism, which are at present known only by name, were in active existence at the time of Appar. Kapalis who made use of human skulls as begging bowls, Mavratis with long matted hair and garlands of bones, Pasupathars and others were seen in the streets of Kanchi and Tiruvarur. There was a whole galaxy of saints at this epoch. Andal, the mystic poetess, the

25 Appar, *Devaram*—Tiruvarur, Tiruvatirai-Tirupadikam.

beloved bride of Sri Ranganatha, and her saintly father, Periyalwar, lived about this time. Sundaramurti-Nayanar, the last of the Devara hymnists, came about two centuries later. Tirumangaimannan, the Vaishnava saint, is probably a contemporary of Sundarar. Sambandhar, Appar and Sundarar have left behind beautiful songs in praise of Shiva, which to this day form the holy book of the Shaivites. Alwars have left behind the *Tiruvaimoli,* the Tamil Veda of the Vaishnavites. Manickavasagar, the prince of mystics, completed the work of Shaiva revival started by the Devara hymnists.[26] Buddhism disappeared from South India ; but the unseen gentle influence of the Buddha, the ideal of compassion to all living creatures and the ethical principles expounded by Him, persisted and became permanently incorporated in the religious life of Tamilakam. Jainism, although it received a set-back, continued to exist in the monasteries, which, besides being centres of religious life, were also functioning as a sort of grammar schools. The elementary treatises on Grammar, Prosody and Poetics and the metrical lexicons (Nighantus), placed in the hands of young students of Tamil even to this day, have come from mediaeval Jain monasteries.

The Alwars and the Nayanmars breathed new life into the people and roused them from their lethargy. The pessimistic attitude of mind fostered in the Jain and Buddhist monasteries gave place to a living faith. The glorious example of the Shaivite and Vaishnavite saints helped the votaries of these religions to lead a life of service and selfless devotion. Princes lavished their wealth in building temples and in patronising poets. The old dynasties of Tamilakam felt their own strength and refused to pay tribute to alien monarchs.[27] By successful encounters they not only freed themselves from the foreign yoke but also subdued their erstwhile rulers. Perhaps, it

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[26] The date of Manickavasakar is yet an open question; there are strong reasons in support of the claim put forward by some scholars fixing his date to the end of the third century.

[27] Sundarar *Devaram* : Koil-padikam.

was during this time that the religion and culture of South India spread to far-off Champa and Cambodia. As a result of the awakening of the spirit, subsequent centuries witness an unprecedented literary revival. Jayamkondan's *Kalingattuparani* and Kamban's immortal epic reach such heights as were never before reached. Kamba-Ramayanam truly reflects the religious thought of the age in which it was written. The old cult of heroism, which regarded valour as the supreme virtue and immortal fame here on earth as the equivalent of immortality hereafter, forms the basis of the lives so beautifully depicted by Kamban. The great God, who forgot His divinity on hearing the wails of a suffering world, walks in the midst of kings, outcastes and recluses as a man among men sharing their joys and sorrows. In Him, the Kshatriya ideal of life finds its fullest manifestation. Kamban has pictured this ideal to its utmost perfection. We find contemporary kings and princes of the royal blood vying with one another in honouring this great poet, who stands unparalleled as the poet of manliness and Kshatriya prowess. The Devara hymns, the works of Manickavasagar and Saint Tirumular and of various other Shaiva poets were collected and arranged into the eleven Tirumurais or holy books of Shaivaism and Sekkilar wrote his story of the Shaiva saints which formed the twelfth Tirumurai. Ramanuja, the great exponent of Visishtadwaita, lived about this time. The sacred utterances of the Alwars were collected and arranged and formed the authoritative scriptures of the Vaishnavas.

We pass on and come to an age, in which men's minds turn once more to philosophical speculations. Meikandan appears on the scene. The same Divine power, which made the child of Shiyali (St. Tirugnana-Sambandhar) utter words of wisdom couched in the language of poesy, speaks once more through the tongue of the child of Tiruvennainallur. The inspired message is now given in the language of philosophy, the language of dialectics and abstract thought. The message is, however, the same. It

is not mere scholastic philosophy that Meikandan expounded. The first half of Siva-gnana-bodham discusses the nature of bondage and freedom and the second half points out the path to the attainment of freedom. Herein we find a synthesis of pure reason and Yogic mysticism which transcends the bounds of reason. Sakala-agama-panditha, the Brahman philosopher, surrenders at the feet of this Vellalah boy and becomes his first disciple, taking the name of Arulnandi-Sivacharya. He composes the *Siva-gnana-Siddhiyar* and *Irupa-irupathu* and hands over the torch of knowledge to Marai-gnana-Sambandhar, who hands it over to Umapathi-Sivacharya. Umapathi is the author of no less than eight works on Saiva Siddhanta of which one, the *Sankalpa-Nirakarana*, probably the last, was written in the Saka year 1235 (that is 620 years ago).

About the same time, Malik Kafur occupied the city of Madura and the subsequent centuries witness the decline and fall of the Pandyas and the Cholas. Foreign invasions, civil wars and internecine intrigues well-nigh exhaust the energy of the hardy Tamil race. With the fall of Vijayanagar, Hindu independence becomes a memory of the past and a sort of mental stupor sets down upon the people; they begin to dream of past glories. The world, in which they lived and moved and had their being, had no attraction for them; they directed their thoughts to regions situated far beyond the mortal ken. Despair seizes the heart of the people, they feel tired of life and shrink in horror from the tortures that might await them on the other side of the grave. The old Tamil warrior, who laughed at death, never thought of inventing a hell; the Buddhists introduced a few, but the priests who came into prominence in this age of degradation ushered into existence twenty-eight crores of hells. The heroic legends of the Sangam age were almost forgotten; the *Jataka* Tales imported by the Buddhists were metamorphosed into new shapes; stories centering round the sage Agastya, episodes from the great epics and tales, fabricated by priestly story-tellers, to illustrate the inexorable working of Karma

supplied the material for unusually long poetical compositions called *Sthala-puranams.* The vast majority of these compositions are but the echoes of the only consolation which priest-craft had to offer to a fallen and degraded people. They exhort the readers not to mind their present trials and tribulations but to make regular offerings to the deities, bathe in the sacred waters, observe fasts and prepare themselves to gain safe entrance to the portals of heaven, ordering out their present life in strict conformity to the dictates of their rightful spiritual guardians, the priests. Monasteries sprung up all over the country. Founded upon Buddhist and Jain models, these institutions fostered to a certain extent religious and secular learning. But their main function was the offering of elaborate worship to the deities and the departed saints who founded the Order. The presiding abbot was paid divine honours even during his lifetime. Slowly and steadily these houses of religion began to accumulate large funds. Flatterers appeared in the guise of poets and received sumptuous meals and costly presents from the presiding abbots. The abbot, secure in his exalted eminence, often led a life of irresponsible ease and knew little or nothing of the miseries of the poor and the downtrodden. The poor people were daily growing poorer, and genuine scholarship was languishing for want of patronage, while a motley crowd of idle parasites consisting of priests, flatterers and the like, were fattening themselves on the food produced by the labour of the poor untouchables. The courts of the chieftains, who ruled over Tamilakam in these troubled times, were also infested with the same kind of parasitic vermin. Sthala-puranas were made to order and wherever incidents or ideas were wanting, they were freely drawn from the inexhaustible source of Sanskrit literature.

The monasteries were not all of one persuasion. All the various sects of Hinduism had their own Maths. In spite of the laxity that was spreading over these institutions, they served the very useful purpose of preserving

the old manuscripts and keeping inextinguished the lamp of learning that was handed down to them through the centuries. Tiruvavaduthurai Athinam, which claims an unbroken line of succession from Meikandan, has preserved the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and has also produced a school of grammarians well-versed both in Sanskrit and Tamil. The chronicles of this Math state that, during the reign of Virupaksha Raja[28] (probably Virupaksha I of Vijayanagar), one Sivaprakasa Desikar of the Thiruvavaduthurai Math preached the doctrines of Virashaivam in the presence of Linganna, one of the ministers of the king. The preaching was so good that the minister requested the monk to be the head of the Virashaiva Math at Tiruvannamalai. With the permission of his monastic superior, Siva-prakasar took charge of the Tiruvannamalai Athinam. This Sivaprakasar should not be confused with Thuraimangalam Sivaprakasa Swamigal, the author of many standard works on Virashaiva philosophy. From the Dharmapura Athinam came Kumara-guru-para Swamigal, the gifted poet and founder of the Tiru-panandal Athinam. Sivagra Yogigal, of Suriyanarkoil Athinam, is another great exponent of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, Vedanta philosophy, which had its votaries from very early times, had extended its influence to such an extent as to be considered a serious rival to Saiva Siddhanta. This is evident from the fact that Arul-nandi-Sivacharya as well as Umapathi-Sivacharya attempt to refute at length the doctrine of Vedantic idealism. There were Vedanta Maths in various parts of the country, where instruction was imparted through the medium of Tamil. Veerai Alawandar, Sri Pattar, Tatwa Rayar and Kannudaiya Vallalar are among those who have enriched Tamil literature with Vedantic thought. The Vaishnava Maths were instrumental in bringing out commentaries on the Divya Prabandhams.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Father Beschi was preaching the doctrines of Roman Catholic

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28 Tiruvavaduthurai Athinam—*Guru-param parai Vilakkam*, page 57.

Christianity and was creating a Christian Tamil literature. Omar, the Tamil poet and others of the Muhammadan faith, were enriching Tamil with Islamic thought; Pillai-perumal-aiyengar was adding to Vaishnava Tamil literature. Thayumanavar, the mystic saint, sets at ease the warring schools of Vedanta and Siddhanta by pointing out the harmony that underlies the two schools of thought. About a century later, comes Ramalinga Swamigal whose devotional hymns are such as would melt the stoniest of hearts. Arumuga Navalar appears in Jaffna and with a reformer's zeal stems the tide of Christian proselytization and extensively makes use of the printing press to popularise the teachings of Shaivaism. The general awakening in Bharat-Varsha rouses the South from its slumber and the message of harmony propounded by Swami Vivekananda, Hinduism's representative to the world's parliament of religions, broadens the outlook of the Hindus and makes them feel that their religion is wide enough to receive light from all quarters and strong enough to withstand all opposition.

We come to modern times. The venerable figure of Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Swaminatha Iyer dominates the realm of Tamil literature for fully half a century. Ceaselessly labouring with untiring patience and industry, he carefully edits and brings out book after book of the ancient Tamil classics, thereby silently ushering in a renaissance in Tamil land. It may perhaps take another half century for Tamilakam to realise the extent of the services rendered to it by the venerable pandit. Only a small fraction of the material, that lay hidden in these ancient books, has so far been brought to light. But that little was sufficient to infuse new life into the Tamilians. The gloom, that overshadowed the country during the past four centuries, is slowly passing away and a new dawn is in sight. The harbinger of the approaching dawn is our latest poet Subrahmanya Bharathi. He is essentially a religious poet. With religious mysticism, he combines an

unbounded love for the poor and the downtrodden. The poems that he addresses to Kannan (Sri Krishna) are as sweet and soul-stirring as any that we meet with in ancient literature; the hymns to Shakti are grander than the old hymns addressed to Korravai. The charm of his lyrics, and the dignified tone of his patriotic songs have endeared him to his people. The healthy outlook on life underlying his poems has a universal appeal. He views humanity as a whole and stands ready to embrace the North and the South, the East and the West, the Brahman and the outcaste as well as the educated and the illiterate. May the Tamil people, the inheritors of a glorious civilisation, view the world with the eyes of Bharathi, their latest poet and rising above narrow sectarianism and petty social conventions march on the path that will lead them to the Divine Spirit, which is the source of all goodness, beauty and truth.

Translating Old Tamil Poetry—Some Suggestions

KAMIL ZVELEBIL.

It might seem at the first glance that the translator of Old Tamil poetry into Czech has hardly anything to say to the English reading world. This opinion, however, might be held only by those who see, somewhat superficially, in the art of translation an instantaneous emanation of inspiration or, on the contrary, a mechanical process of transposition of one text into another. The problem of translation is far from being so simple ; let the translator, who is responsible for quite a number[1] of translations from Tamil into Czech, be allowed to say a few words about some theoretic principles and problems of his work.

He will not speak about the translation of modern Tamil prose into his own language ; though there is a lot also in this sphere which is problematic and difficult, the matters are not at all so complicated as when facing the task of the translation of Old Tamil poetry into Czech verse.

Whenever one reads carefully the oldest Tamil poems in their original language, one must agree with the words of the French Indologist P. Meile, who says : "La valeur

1 The author has published a number of translations from Old and New Tamil, both prosaical and poetic, in various magazines. Also, three books have been translated so far by the present author. They are : Faher C. J. Beschi's பரமார்த்த குருவின் கதை under the title "*Zertovne pribehy Mistra Paramarty*" (The Jocose Accidents of Master Paramarta), Prague, 1954 (edition de luxe) ; an anthology of amorous poems translated from different old Tamil collections under the title " கரும்பூ *Cerny kvet*" (Black Flower), Prague, 1955 (edition de de luxe) ; a greater anthology of old Tamil lyrical poetry (200 stanzas), compiled mostly from the *Nattin:ai*, *Akam*, *Putam*, *Kaliththokai* and *Kutunhthokai* collections, under the title "*Kvety jasminu*" (Blossoms of jessamine) is under print.

littéraire de ces poèms est de premier ordre. Concis, elégants, sans bravure, presque toujours d'un mouvement vif et animés de sentiments trés humains, parfois d'une émotion poignante, ils sont, dans la plénitude du terme, classique: plus sobres et moins rhétoriques que Pindare, qui est le meilleur terme de comparaison,ce sont presque les seules productions de l'Inde qui, exemptes de préciosite, et n'abusant pas de la virtuosité intellectuelle,aient la grâce,l'équilibre et la sobriete de l'art attique."[2]

Thus it has become the task of the author of this article to translate the old Tamil verses for the Czechoslovak reader in such a way, that they would impress him in the same manner in which the orginal had impressed the reader having the knowledge of Old Tamil or—which is surely the ideal of all translation—that they would evoke, in the modern reader, analogical emotions, feelings and ideas to those which had been evoked in that reader —or better listener—or whom the verses had been, originally, destined. This is—once more it has to be stressed—the ideal of all artistic translatorship ; only very few exceptionally gifted translators can achieve it and it is a question whether it is at all possible to attain this aim when translating from ancient oriental literatures into modern European idioms. It is, nevertheless, the task of every serious translator to try hard to reach it.

There are especially two main kinds of problems which arise when solving this task, i.e. the questions as far as the contents of the texts is concerned, and the problems concerning their form.

As far as the first complex of problems is concerned, it is possible to express briefly the chief difficulty arising from those problems in the very natural premise that, to the Czech and any foreign reader of the 20th century, many of the concepts, ideas and happenings described in

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[2] In L'Inde classique, II, Paris—Hanoi, 1953, p. 302.

the old texts are not at all so current and natural or at least so easily understandable as they had been to the Tamil listener nearly two thousands of years ago. This obvious fact is met with at every step in practical work and it finds a detailed expression in a number of concrete minute difficulties: how to translate some concepts, characteristic only for the nature and society of ancient Tamilnad, into modern Czech verse? Let us give only a very brief outline of some of these difficulties.

As far as the local or personal names and mythologic conceptions have occurred in the original texts, the translator took the liberty to leave them out sometimes or to paraphrase them or, which is most recommendable, to explain them directly in the text.[3]

It is necessary to stress that an excessive appearance of such original proper names would be a menace to the aesthetic quality of the translation; and the main purpose of the translator has been to give to the Czech reader a translation as much perfect and polished as possible, which would read well, smoothly, without difficulties and with pleasure.

There are, further, some conceptions and ideas and happenings described in the original texts which are

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[3] Thus, not each place-name, appearing in the text, has been included in the Czech translation. (e.g. போர் *Akam*, 377, குளமுற்றம் *Putam*, 34 etc.). Naturally, also many personal names have been left out or paraphrased in the Czech translation, e.g. எழினி (*Kut.* 80), பழையன் மாறன் (*Ak.* 346); on the other hand, it would not be right to exclude all original proper names, local or personal, from the text of the translation. These proper names, used conveniently and at the right place, evoke a strange foreign atmosphere, they furnish the text with a strange colouring and, if they are also phonetically pleasing to the ear of the readers of the translation, they should certainly be used after careful consideration.

Regarding the technique of explanation in the text itself: in the original (*Put.* 105), e.g. *Pa:ri* (பாரி) is mentioned; in the translation this name has been kept with a direct explanation: *Pa:ri, the chieftain*; or, there may be some original name of a peculiar flower mentioned; it is included in the translation and its colour or any other attributes is mentioned together, e.g. *fragrant* or *white mullai*. Thus the reader has at least an approximate idea of the thing or person mentioned and no explanatory foot-notes are necessary, which, needless to say, would be aesthetically impossible in an artistic translation of verses.

utterly foreign and void of any meaning to the Czech modern reader; it was necessary to substitute analogical concepts, current and full of meaning, for those of the original Tamil texts, if it was possible. This does not concern only some specific names of many species of plants and animals, which are typical for South India,[4] but also some conceptions which are, for the modern European reader, hardly imaginable or even aesthetically or ethically unbearable.[5]

It has to be emphasized, however, that this does not mean that the translator might treat the text with immodest and unrestrained arbitrariness, that he might "remodel" and paraphrase and "repaint" the original. Such treatment would not lead to a translation, but to a free repro-

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[4] Thus, e.g., in old Tamil verses, we find a series of terms for different species of lotus or jasmine; we may leave the term untranslated only if we have no equivalent or analogy, at least approximate, in our language; the Czech reader imagines nothing under the different terms முல்லை மல்லிகை, மல்லிகம் etc.; if, however, we substitute for these names the common Czech word "*jasmin*" (jasmine), the reader imagines at once fragrant white blossoms, which is quite suitable and sufficient for our purpose. If, on the other hand, there is absolutely no Czech term for a herb or an animal found in the text, it is necessary to leave the original Tamil name and naturally not to introduce a Latin botanical or zoological term (thus we leave e.g. புன்னை as *punnai* and we do not use Calophyllum inophyllum).

[5] These are the most delicate cases; it concerns some expressions like அல்குல் (*alkul*) or திதலை (*thithalai*), sometimes even in the connection *thithalai alkul* (as in *Natt.* 84); in an artistic translation one cannot naturally translate literary *mons veneris* or *pudendum muliebre*; it has to be translated as "lap" or "waist"; *thithalai*: these spots and spreadings on the skin have been regarded as beautiful in the time of ancient Tamil poets; it is however doubtful if the Czech modern reader would appreciate its aesthetic function if the term would be translated literally by "spots on the skin"; thus it has been necessary to say something like "beauty-marks". Another instance concerns the idea of சிலிர்ப்பு (*cilirppu*), "horripilation, erection of hair from emotion"; this, again, has been necessary to periphrase with "she was trembling from delight". Also some concepts of கைக்கிளை *kaikkil:ai* or மடலேறுதல் *mat:ale:tuthal* are strange and difficult to comprehend for the modern European reader and they must be treated, in the translation, with caution. What has been said about these cases, concerns also the sphere of புறம் (*putam*), of war; many concepts and descriptions of the fighting and especially of the carousals of demons etc. are very strange and may even have a repulsive effect on the modern foreign reader. It would not be right, of course, just not to translate such stanzas; the picture of classical Tamilnad, evoked by the translations, ought to be complete and organic. But such cases must be treated carefully.

duction, to a paraphrase. *On the other hand, it is fairly* impossible to produce a good artistic translation of such ancient oriental texts which would be at the same time entirely true and strictly accurate. Such accurate translation—not artistic—is necessary when dealing with the texts from the points of scientific investigation, philological, literary or historic ; it would be absurd to prepare such a translation for a wide circle of readers, for the masses of common foreign "consumers" who often do not know anything about the literature and its background in question. *The translator must never forget his "social* order", i.e. the kind of people for whom his work has been destined, he must not forget his readers.

What holds good for the problems of contents and subject-matter, is equally valid when speaking about the form.

Each and every language has created naturally its own, special and characteristic poetical diction and forms, which are hardly imitable ; often, they are entirely inimitable.[6]

Thus it is impossible to transfer the quantitative features of the old Tamil verse into Czech form, the nature of Czech verse being entirely different from the quantitative rhythmical forms of Tamil. In Czech, stressed and unstressed syllables alternate, thus producing rhythm ; it is the opposition of quality ; in Old Tamil, the essence of rhythmical structure may be seen in the alternation of short and long syllables, in the quantitative opposition. The difference between the two systems is so essential, that any effort to imitate the Tamil form in Czech must end in failure.

6 Everything is, of course, possible. And there were some efforts made in the literature of translation (also in Czech) to substitute one form for another exactly and precisely, e.g. for the Sanskrit verse of 17 syllables a wholly artificial Czech metre of 17 *syllables was used; needless to say* that such translations did not have any artistic effect and that their aesthetic value was disputable.

Then there is the problem of the தொடை (Thot: ai). The true means of aesthetic effect is, in Czech, besides the rhythm, the final rhyme; in Tamil, different forms of alliteration and consonance. The task of the translator is to find such form which would do justice to the nature of old Tamil versification by means of a system, peculiar and natural to Czech. Thus, the true final rhyme of Czech poetry has been used where, in Tamil verse, some forms of "initial rhyme" எதுகைத்தொடை (ethukaiththot: ai) were in operation; where, in the Tamil original, different arts of மோனைத்தொடை (mo: naiththot: ai) occurred, the translator attempted to produce some kind of consonance and alliteration also in the Czech translation. It is hardly necessary to stress that all cases have not been translated in the same way according to a single "recipe"; it was necessary to treat every single case individually; translation is, after all, an art; thus the author tried, e.g., even some innovations in Czech verse for instance to introduce the "initial rhyme" in some of his translations etc.

The fundamental feature of an artistic translation must remain, however, the effort to substitute real poetry for poetry and not some kind of hybrid half-poetry half-prose; the means cannot mostly be identical where oriental languages are concerned analogy has to be used; there must be nothing forced and rigid in the translation, its language and form must be artful but not artificial.

Let us conclude with some theoretic principles which are, according to our view, necessary to follow when translating from ancient oriental languages into modern European idioms, if the aim of our efforts has to be the artistic translation, determined for the common reader, a translation, which would mean, for him, an incitement to read more and deeper in the literature in question.

1. It is unnecessary to cling too anxiously to every line of the contents, or to adhere to an accurate, stiff imitation of form.

2. This does not mean, however, an arbitrary treatment of the subject-matter and form of the original. The gist of the poetic quality of the text, the essential features of the original, viz. the metaphor in the broad sense of this term, the peculiar way which shows how the poet perceives and transforms the world, the specific way of how he depicts this outer world and describes his reflexions—this must be truly, nay, even devotedly kept in the translation. The details are not so important ; it is better to keep truly and devotedly the essence and nature of the poet's metaphors than to cling to trifles and details in a servile way and, at the same time, to lose the spirit and nature of the whole.

Such translation, which is, according to our view, an ideal one, we do not call a literal, an accurate translation ; but it is neither a paraphrase, a free transposition ; it is an artistic, aesthetically effective poetic translation in between the two extremes, a translation which keeps the specific features of the original text, which evokes the picture of Tamil India in the first centuries of the Christian era, but, at the same time, is read by the masses of readers without any misunderstandings and difficulties, with interest, eagerly and with pleasure.

Let it be permitted to the translator to remark with all due modesty that these principles have proved to be successful in praxis, and that his translations have been widely and favourably accepted.

Bow Song: A Folk Art from South Travancore

K. P. S. HAMEED.

The southernmost part of Travancore called 'Nanjilnad', meaning 'the land of the plough', is essentially an agricultural country supplying rice almost to the whole of Travancore-Cochin. The people who inhabit this area are simple peasant folk, leading a happy and contented life. They are Tamils, proud of their 'southern' Tamil with its 'southern' air. They are proud too of their own scholars who won laurels and brought glory to their native land. One of them was Mahamathi, Sathavathani, K. P. Seiku Tampi Pavalar, perhaps the last of the great classicists, a great grammarian, scholar and critic, whose prodigious scholarship was the envy of even scholars in Tamilnad; another was Isai Chelvar T. S. Lakshmana Pillai, the most outstanding musical composer in Tamil of recent times. The late Kavimani S. Desikavinayagam Pillai, the famous poet was another distinguished son of Nanjilnad. The agitation led by the Tamils of Nanjilnad for the merger of the Tamil districts of Travancore with the Madras State is well known. Their love for Tamil has given them a political and social solidarity.

The folk songs of Nanjilnad are as charming and as alluring as the country to which they belong. Sweet and mellifluous, their folk songs flow like a clear and sparkling woodland brook winding its zigzag way, producing soft and novel melodies. Sung by the young and old alike in the many beautiful villages in Nanjilnad, the lilting tunes and the enchanting music of these folk are a feast to those who hear them. Naturally enough, the songs reflect the

many strange customs and habits in the life of the Tamil community here. The singularly striking nuances in the local dialect reveal the many distinct characteristics, long associated with those who were once supposed to have occupied the now submerged main land, south of Cape Comorin. Words which are no longer current in Tamil Nad could still be found in the texts of these songs. It will be a matter of interest to philologists to note how a vast majority of these words is retained by the Malayalam language and have acquired down the century different shades of meanings.

One of the quaint types of folk music, which still stands as a symbol of the cultural wealth of the Tamils, is what is popularly known as '*Villu Pattu*' in Tamil, literally translated as 'bow song'. The materials that go to make up the orchestra producing the background music for the rendering of the bow song are interesting. It consists of a very big bow made either of a sturdy branch of a tree or of metal. The two ends of the bow are tied by a strong high tension string. The centre of the convex side of the bow is made to rest on the neck of a large sized earthen pitcher. The pitcher itself rests on a soft cushion or a circular disc-like thing with a concave cavity made of coconut fibre. Thus the bow when placed on the neck of the pitcher and held in delicate balance by the performers looks like a magnified crescent with its two ends looking upwards. There are numerous bronze bells hanging from the bow in a row from top to bottom.

The chief vocalist of the party will be seated in the centre of the bow with two slender wooden rods called the 'Veesukol', one in each hand. At one end of each rod, just near where the artist grips it, are found two cymbals the concave face of each facing and touching the other; it makes a sort of cavity, containing beads or small-sized metal balls or stones inside. The artist, while singing, will so artfully raise and move his hands holding the rods as to express the mood and the 'bhava' portrayed in the

song, and deftly strike against the bow string producing the 'tala' or the time beat, synchronising with the stresses and the time beats in the song. This in turn will produce notes from the bells hanging from the bow. At the same time, the artist in charge of the big earthen pitcher will raise simultaneous notes, by beating against the mouth of the pitcher with a cardboard-like plate, made for the purpose from a stiff and sturdy plantain sheath. The sweet sound emanating from the pitcher will seem to come from within the pitcher, owing to the pressure exerted on it both by the weight of the bow resting on its neck and the beats brought to bear on its mouth by the pitcher player, and is perhaps more charming and melodious than that produced by any other percussion instrument like the 'Mridangam', 'Dholak,' 'Khole' and 'Kanchira'. The pitcher player while he strikes against the mouth of the pitcher with his right hand, strikes at the same time on the body of the pitcher with a piece of coin held in his left hand. There is another percussion instrument called the 'Udukku' which the player holds in a horizontal position while playing. A second member in the party will keep 'tala', with the aid of two small wooden pieces called the 'Kashta'. A third member will play the cymbals. When the bow song programme is in full swing there is a perfect coordination of music in which the bow, bell and percussion instruments operate together, each producing by itself and in combination vigorous and fast-moving music in keeping with the moods of the ballad. When the chief vocalist sings, the others play on their instruments and when the others sing, the chief vocalist plays with his 'Veesukol' on the string of the bow. The spirited gestures and movements of the members of the bow song party during the performance often stimulate a sympathetic response in the audience who make similar gestures and movements almost unconsciously. The bow song artists put into their programmes so much life and enthusiasm that the simple village folk who constitute the audience abandon themselves in their enjoyment. Arrangements

for the performance of the programme are usually made on the open ground in front of the village temple. The performance itself is got up as a rule in connection with the temple festival, lasting for about a week's time, during the months September to January every year. The dais for the performers will be set up in front of the temple on one side and the audience will be seated on grounds facing the Deity.

The bow song troupe usually consists of eight members but sometimes ten or twelve. The duration of the programme will depend largely on the length of the story chosen for rendering. If the episode portrayed is a small one it will be finished in one session itself. On the other hand, if the theme is mythological or is taken from the 'puranas' or the 'ithihasas', it will take a much longer duration. Stories from the Ramayana or the Mahabharatha once begun will require a number of sessions lasting for three or four days, with two or three sessions each day ; the first session is usually the longest, beginning at 9 p.m. and lasting for about five hours ; and the second sessions is from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and the third one from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. The leader of the troupe is generally a shrewd judge of mass psychology and he knows well how, where and when, in the course of a folk ballad, he should allow an interval.

The texts of the songs are simple and flowing and are invariably in ballad style. Almost every line is couched in the rural dialect. The idioms and phrases in use among the villagers have acquired in these songs a new form and have become pregnant with meaning. One can find in the running metres of these songs a sort of counterpoint rhythm and an internal rhyme based on stresses which serve to enhance the value of the music in them. The texts also abound in proverbs. Many proverbs in Tamil which would have otherwise become extinct have been saved and handed down to us through these ballads. Another important aspect of the text is that almost every couplet

or stanza ends with a refrain. As soon as the chief vocalist in the party finishes singing a couplet or a stanza, the other members of the party take up the refrain and sing it in chorus. The repetition of the refrain enables the listening audience to follow the trend of the story with ease.

The stories are composed almost entirely in verse. However there are a few stories, usually the longer ones, where the songs are interspersed with prose. This prose is bombastic and stilted. The chief vocalist is also the story-teller.

The stories are woven round a variety of themes, supernatural, mythological, devotional, historical and social. But the most popular stories are the supernatural. The very instrument and the music produced by it are especially suited for stories set against a supernatural background. Except for some passing references and scenes in 'Silappadikaram', 'Manimekhalai' and certain works of a later age like the 'Thakkayaga Parani' group of works, one does not find anything bordering on the supernatural, in Tamil literature. In the bow songs however, the supernatural is freely resorted to. Physical and psychic manifestations, culminating in partial on complete materialization of devils and evil spirits, are not wanting in these ballads. Appeasement of wicked spirits and the gods of their worlds, human sacrifices, gruesome and horror-striking situations—these and many other weird things figure in these stories. Yet the idea behind the supernatural in these stories is to illustrate the triumph of good over evil. The most popular of these stories is 'Pazhavoor Nili', also known as 'Pazhayanoor Nili' in the adjoining Tirunelveli District. The story deals with frustrated love and continues from one birth to the next. In fact not only this story but all the other stories coming under this category consider time as one long continuous stretch without any past, present or future. In Pazhavoor Nili, a certain young man, belonging to a trading commu-

nity, becomes enamoured, a few months after his marriage with Nili, of another woman of irresistible charm and deserts his young and loving wife. One day his mistress comes to Nili's house to see her lover. Nili, shuts the door against the mistress and sends her away. The enraged mistress decides to wreak vengeance on Nili. She refuses admittance to her lover when he calls later at her chambers. When asked for the reason, she tells him in detail the treatment meted out to her by Nili. He promises to make amends and begs to be admitted. She again refuses telling him that the only way to make amends to her satisfaction is to go back to Nili and return with the bejewelled 'tali', the marital tie of Nili. Thereupon he goes to Nili and lives with her for some months. He then tells Nili one day of his desire to leave his own native town with her and settle in some far-off town so that they could for ever live away from the sight of his wicked mistress. Nili welcomes the idea and both leave the house one night and reach a forlorn well in the middle of a forest. It is a moonlit night and young Nili who is now in the family way entreats her husband to spend that night by the side of the well. Accordingly they break the journey and spread their bed right under the wall of the fathomless well. The night, the moon, the sweet scent of the forest flowers and everything around above and about Nili exercise a strange spell on her. With fond words of love and affection she wraps up her husband under her arms. Nili's husband, who has been patiently waiting for this opportunity snatches her costly 'tali' and, deaf to her heart-rending screams, treacherously pushes her down into the well and hastens back to his fond mistress. With this ends the story in the first birth. In the next birth, the murderer husband, reborn again as a merchant, is on his way to the town where he lived in his previous birth and happens to halt near the same well on a moonlit night. Nili's ghost comes out of the well, and appears before her husband as a woman of surpassing beauty and claims the lonely traveller as her husband. Taken aback he looks steadily at

her for a moment, comes to the conclusion that she is a 'mohini', an enchantress of the ghost world, and instantaneously rejects her. The claim and its rejection are referred to the Wise men of the neighbouring village, who after hearing both sides give their verdict in favour of Nili, duly declaring the traveller as Nili's husband. Further the Wise men allot a house in the village and order the couple to live there. They enter their new abode. There is joy written all over her face. All the unfulfilled passions, which were cut short at a most crucial stage of her former life, come up again in full fury that night, and she hugs him to her bosom, only to sap the life out of him. The following day the Wise men of the village come to the house only to find the dead body of the traveller with the woman missing. The degree of dramatic tension produced by this story can be understood only when one actually listens to its performance by the bow song troupe.

Another famous ballad is named 'Maruthanayakam Pillai'. It deals with the life of a wicked man, who by foul means tries to seduce the wife of his elder brother. The folk ballad entitled 'Chinna Thambi', much appreciated in Tirunelveli District, portrays how, in order to win a rich treasure from an evil spirit, a wealthy landlord made a human sacrifice of the only son of a poor peasant in his service.

Apart from the variety of themes and stories, another very interesting feature in this folk art is the extempore debate in verse. The party divides itself into two groups. The main singer with the 'Veesukol', those who sing with him and the two men who keep 'Tala' by playing on the 'Kashta' and the cymbals form into one group while the 'Pitcher player', 'Udukku player' and those who sing with them form into another group. The first group of persons singing from the right hand side will be called the 'Rightists' (Valathe Padupavar) and those who sing from the left hand side will be called the 'Leftists' (Idathe Padupavar). The 'rightists' will compose verses on the

spot in a particular tune. The subject matter of the verses may be anything under the sun. Usually the verses will be on 'Vedanta' or 'Siddhanta', mysticism, philosophy or theology. Usually the verses of the 'rightists' will contain a series of questions and the 'leftists' will have to answer them in verses of the same metre and tune as those employed by the 'rightists'.

This is similar to the practice that obtained among the poets and scholars of Tamilnad till very recently,—the practice of singing 'Asu Kavi'. To test a poet's accomplishments and erudition, the other poets and pundits assembled often subjected him to a tough and exacting examination; for instance they would ask him to compose on the spot a verse of a particular pattern with a specified idea. To test one's prowess in the art of versification, the examiners sometimes asked the examinee to compose a stanza of four or eight lines, which should end with one or two lines supplied by the examiners. Any one who failed to complete the verse according to the specifications faced the ignominy of defeat.

In a similar manner, if in the course of a spirited debate in verse between the leaders of the two groups in the bow song troupe, one leader fails to answer in appropriate verse and in the appropriate tune the question put to him by his opponent, then he will be declared as 'Thallu Kavi', i.e., a rejected poet and asked to leave the dais.

The following song from Shenbakaramanputhur, a village in Nanjilnad, illustrates the type of questions put by the leader of the 'rightists' to his opponent :

Tell me straight
The position of the five letters
Tell me straight
And clearly the meaning of 'Hari' *

Tell me straight
The story of the birth of the bow
Tell me straight
How this rod came to play on the bow

Tell me straight
The tone of these bells on this good bow
Tell me straight
The secret of their trembling heart-beats

Tell now straight
To your pupils or else leave the bow
Away straight
And run away, you run away now!

The word of five letters referred to is of course சிவாயநம (Ci va: ya na ma), which contains five Tamil letters (syllabic) which every Shaivaite devotee knows.

The next song, from Aralvaimozhi, another village in South Travancore, is about the famous hero, Iravi Kutti Pillai, who died fighting to save the honour of the people of Nanjilnad, and describes in detail how the Chieftain's army marched towards the battle field. The theme of competition in this song between the contending parties is the comparative merits of bronze and silver, one party's descriptions all centering on bronze and the other party's on silver. The rivalry between the 'bronze' and 'silver' parties and the attempt of each to outwit the other reflect an imagination, balanced by keen observation.

The timpano on the elephant's back
Is made of bronze
The resounding drums small and big are
All made of bronze
The bugle, kettle and base drums are
All made of bronze
The headwear of the Pathan's Arab steed
Is made of bronze!

And pat comes the answering description of the 'silver' party in equally good liquid loveliness of sound and rhythmic beat of verse:

Ravi Pillai's pearl white umbrella
Is made of silver
The fans used by his minister's servants

Are made of silver
And the swords, betel and snuff boxes
Are made of silver
His Chinese flautist's vertical flute
Is made of silver !

The reference to the Arab steed and the Chinaman's flute incidentally recall the brisk seaborne trade which Tamilnad had with Arabia and China in the distant past. The Arabs used to come with the starting of the South-west monsoon with their ship-loads of horses and land at the ports of Kumari, Eyirpattinam, Tondi and Korkkai to obtain in exchange sandal, ivory, pearl, pepper and spices. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Sundarapandiyan, the Pandiya king and his brothers, are reported to have imported annually about 2000 horses each from Arabia. The north-east monsoon enabled the Chinese to reach the shores of the Tamil country with silk, copper, tortoise shells, perfumes and cosmetics and many other dainty articles which were popular with the Tamils of those days.

A debate in verse, similar to the one practised by the bow song party, still obtains in some villages of Tiruchirapalli and Tanjavoor districts, in the course of the performance of another folk art, called ' Lavani '. Here, however, the scope of the debate and subject matter are limited. In this debate, one person asserts that ' Kaman ', the god of love, was burnt to death by Lord Shiva, while his opponent refutes this and maintains that ' Kaman ' though burnt by the wrath of Shiva never died.

These practices show that poetry was the language both of the princes and of the poor, with perhaps this difference that the language of the former was like a well-cut diamond, whereas that of the latter resembled an unhewn stone.

In recent years, this folk art has undergone many changes. The form, structure and technique, both as

regards the themes and ways of rendering, have been greatly modified. Songs and music occupy only a secondary place, the story being narrated principally in prose. The songs introduced in between are rendered in the more sophisticated Carnatic style. Musical discourses of the type of 'Kathakalakshepam' are also now being performed with the aid of this instrument, as also musical burlesques and social satires. But whatever the nature of the change and the manner of presentation, the potentialities of this folk art as a powerful instrument of mass appeal remain unimpaired.

The Song of Madurai[1]

மதுரைக் காஞ்சி

V. KANDASWAMI MUDALIAR

Studded with bee-hives golden, wind-swept hills
Rise from the bosom of the earth washed
By boisterous breakers of the roaring seas.
Stars of day swerve not from their courses appointed ;
The flaming sun that lights the day, the silver moon
That illumines night shine in radiance spotless ;
Rains fail not, and fields fertile bear fruit
To a thousand fold, carpeting the land
With the splendour of their harvests golden ;
And branches of trees hang low, laden with fruit ;
Man and wife are bright with flush of happiness
Full-fed ; and the cardinal tuskers four,
Stately and caparisoned bright, bear aloft
The burden goodly of the earth far-flung
On their rounded shoulders ample and large.
The wealth of plenty ceaseless dwindles not a mite
Through consumption, nor the landscape fair fades
Through evil looks cast at their abundance.
The people of the city large, and of streets wide
And well-ordered, in full happiness live,
Under the sheltering wings of their king
Cherished deep ; and who, guided by ministers
True but never false, holds his regal sway,
True to the glory of his ancestors great.
In the crimson field of carnage, corpses
Headless, time with dance-steps of the ghoul

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1 Today the second largest city in the South ; it was the capital of Pandian-land, one of the three Tamilian Kingdoms of ancient India ; even during Asoka's time these three were independent.

That had gorged on the gory carcasses
Of tuskers that lie with their severed trunks.
On severed heads of the fallen enemies,
Arranged like a frightful oven, the demon cook
Well-versed in cunning culinary art,
In a pot of crimson blood of fallen Kings,
Bubbling on the fire of his flaming wrath,
Prepares sacrificial rice by stirring
With ladles of the severed and wristleted arms,
As a blood offering to steel the arms
Of warriors, who to the quake of their enemies
Would not turn their backs on the field of war.
　　Of such a force large and ever victorious
Art thou, Sovereign Liege, the King.
Thou art equal to divine Agastya[1],
Templed on the Pothia-hills[2] flashing silvern
With water-falls, who crushed Ravana[3]
The lord of the surging, southern, blue seas.
　　Gaily-visored war tuskers wallow deep
In the mire of their fragrant ichor,
And sweep the battlefield, spreading carnage
Among enemies in frightful order arranged.
　　Harnessed to chariots strong as steel, leaping
War-horses fleeter of foot than racing wind
Raise a cloud of dust sanguine and darken
The flaming orb of day in welkin blue.
　　With arms toughened through use of flashing steel,
You have with chieftain-kings vanquished
The Chera[4] and the Chola[5] Kings ; with it
Not content, you have other chiefs vanquished,
In their homes flanked by towering hills gleaming
With mountain-streams ; and other smaller chiefs

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[1] Agastya was the divine founder of the Tamil tongue ; he was in Pothia-hills in Tirunelveli district, where Tampiraparani river takes its rise.

[2] Pothia-hills in Tirunelveli district.

[3] The ten-headed and twenty-shouldered mythical monster with whom Rama, the hero of Ramayana, warred for the abduction of Sita, his consort.

[4] [5] Two of the three kings of Tamilian Kingdoms of the South.

Of dark forest-lands serried with tall trees.
Thus had added to your world-wide renown.
Thou art a scion of great Umbal-Pandian[1]
Of gleaming golden garland, and art likened
To bellowing thunder which scorches trees
Of the hillside, and scatters to the winds four
The rocks powdered by the fierce thunder-bolt.
Kings, whose lands are belted by forests dark
Against enemies, and whose circling ramparts
Are girdled by deep moats, and from whose fort-walls
Battlemented, and of towering gateways,
A cloud of sharp arrows is rained thick,
Are now divorced from victory of wars ;
And, subject unto you as vassals,
Carry out your behests now as old friends.
And thou art the King of Kings of domains
Between the towering Meru[2]-mountains
In the north, the Virgin[3]-Cape in the south,
The calm deep waters of the eastern blue seas,
And of the sounding western oceans deep.
Ships, stately with mast-heads of flapping flags,
Laden with goods of sovereign worth, cleave
Through the rolling waves of the dark blue sea,
Canopied with clouds, and reach your broad shores
To the welcome peal of kettle-drums[4] large.
Urged by the furious wild wind across the seas
The fleet of vessels of swollen dusky sails,
Lying at anchor on the heaving seas,
Is like cloud-capped hills rising in the distance.
And you are the doughty victor of Saliyoor[5],
Named after salinel[6] the rarest of grains.
Its ports on clear deep waters are lined long

---

1 The far remote ancestor and the most famous of Pandian Kings.

2 The Olympus of Hindus, probably the Himalayas.

3 Modern Cape Comorin of S. India where there is a temple dedicated to the Virgin (*Kanya*) Goddess.

4 It is a large kettle-drum of nearly three feet in diameter ; it is a war-drum, and was beaten at fort-gates and now at temple-gates.

5 6 A small kingdom of a chieftain, near Madurai, named after red-paddy (*salinel*) for which it was probably famous.

With yawning ware-houses and swarms with ships.
Your shores and far hills echo with the tumult
Of home-coming traffickers from far seas;
Echo with the cry of those who goad bulls
At the thrashing ground; with the silver peal
Of bells round the necks of bulls; with the beat
Of the flails, which scatter the golden grains
Like the broken rays of the radiant dawn;
With the cry of those who scare away birds
From harvest fields; with the song of those,
Who, drawn up in a line, flood the green fields
With the water of baling-buckets dragged
From the brimming freshes of tanks; with the strain
Amoebaean of men who tread the *picotta*[1],
And with the dance steps of Baratha[2] maids
On sand-dunes set with sparkling sapphires
Of Mundaga[3] flowers; and those mingle sweet
With the drum-measure of war-minstrels
In villages surging with festive noises.
Thou, the vanquisher of Kutwas[4], loadest
The War-minstrels of shoulders broad and round
With gifts of herds of cattle, with stately elephants
Of gleaming tusks, their calves and jewels priceless,
And decorate them with golden stars lotus-shaped.

(To be continued)

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[1] A baling bucket attached to a pole for lifting water from wells.

[2] People of shore land, their chief occupation was fishing and salt-growing; they were traders.

[3] Indian night shade.

[4] People of a chieftain state (Kutta-nadu).

News and Notes

CEYLON OFFICIAL LANGUAGE BILL PASSED

Claim of Tamil Turned Down

Colombo, June 15.

Ceylon's House of Representatives today passed the Government Bill to declare Sinhalese the sole State language, turning down, in effect, the claim of Tamil for official recognition.

The voting at the end of a Marathan 14-hour session, which ended at 6 a.m. was 66 in favour, and 29 against.

The voting showed that the Government got two votes short of two-thirds majority in the 101-member House.

The Government Party was supported by its predecessor in office, the United National Party and nominated members. Ranged against it were members representing the Tamil-speaking areas and the Leftist parties, who pleaded for parity of status for Tamil and Sinhalese as official languages of the country.

Keen Interest

The Bill, the most controversial piece of legislation ever introduced in independent Ceylon's Parliament, evoked greater popular interest than any single political event in the island's recent history.

—*" The Mail ", Friday, June 15, 1956.*

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

Department of Indian Studies

Singapore, July 6.

The University of Malaya would open a Department of Indian Studies when the new academic session begins in October, the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Sir Sydney Caine, announced today.

The new Department would be developed to cover a wider range of studies in Indian culture and languages but emphasis in the beginning would be on Tamil language and literature, Sir Sydney said.

Mr. M. Rajakannu, Lecturer in Tamil in the Government Arts College, Madras, has been appointed by arrangement with the Government of Madras to head the department.

Dr. C. S. Pichamuthu, the well known Indian Geologist, will head the Geology Department to be added to the University from October.

Dr. Pichamuthu is at present Director of Geology, Government of Mysore, and is also Professor of Geology in the Mysore University.

—*" Hindu ", July 7, 1956.*

ANNAMALAI UNIVERSITY

Department of Philological Research

Mr. R. Radhakrishnan, who was attached to the School of Oriental and African Studies and worked directly under Professor J. R. Forth in the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics, is reported to have joined the new Department of Philological Research in Tamil in the Annamalai University.

A TAMIL POET

Here is another project undertaken by the archaeologists.

I learn that experts of the Archaeological Survey of India, Southern Circle, will begin on Saturday excavation at a selected site in Kunrathur. The purpose : they hope to get more information about the Tamil Poet, Sekkizhar and his times.

Sekkizhar, was born in Kunrathur, 20 miles from the city (Madras). He lived about 800 years ago, was Chief Minister of Kulotunga Chola. But he is more well-known as the author of Periya Puranam, a monumental poetical work on the lives of 63 Saivaite saints of South India.

—"*Mail*", *5th March, 1956.*

The Government of Madras in their Order No. Ms. 2207, dated 22nd June, 1956, have approved the Committee constituted by the Madras Presidency Tamil Sangham, Tirunelveli, consisting of the persons mentioned below for the purpose of finalising the glossary of Tamil equivalents for the English Administrative terms prepared by it.

1. Sri S. Venkateswaran, I.C.S.,
   Member, Board of Revenue, Chepauk, Madras-5.
   (*Chairman*)
2. Sri M. Ananthanarayanan, I.C.S.,
   Director of Legal Studies, Madras.
3. Sri T. K. Sankaravadivelu, I.A.S.,
   Secretary to Government, Revenue Department, Fort St. George, Madras-9.
4. Sri N. D. Sundaravadivelu, M.A., L.T.,
   Director of Public Instruction, Madras.
5. Sri M. R. Perumal,
   Principal, Teachers' College, Saidapet, Madras.
6. Sri N. Vinayakam, Senior Translator to Government.
7. Sri P. Kothandaraman of the Swadesamitran.
8. Sri C. Amritaganesa Mudaliar,
   Secretary, Indian Red Cross Society.
9. Sri R. P. Sethu Pillai,
   Professor of Tamil, University of Madras.

10. Sri K. Kothandapani Pillai,
Member, Railway Service Commission,
Madras-17.

11. Sri M. A. Kuttalalingam Pillai, B.A.,
Retired Collector, Palayamkottai.

12. Dr. D. R. Annamalai Pillai,
L.C.P.S., L.M.S.S.S.A., M.R.A.S. (London),
Retired Assistant Surgeon, Palayamkottai.

13. Sri A. Arulappan, B.A.,
Professor of Tamil, St. Xavier's College,
Palayamkottai.

14. Sri S. Ramaswami Konar, B.A., B.L.,
President, Madras Presidency Tamil Sangham.

15. Professor A. Muthiah Pillai,
Professor of Economics, Pachaiyappa's College,
Madras-10.

16. Sri R. V. Krishna Ayyar,
Secretary to the Madras Legislature (Retd.).

17. Dr. Manavala Ramanujam.

18. Sri E. M. Subramania Pillai,
Secretary, Madras Presidency Tamil Sangam.

Transliteration of Tamil Phonemes* into English

VOWELS

அ	—	a	(as in among)
ஆ	—	a:	(,, calm)
இ	—	i	(,, sit)
ஈ	—	i:	(,, machine)
உ	—	u	(,, full)
ஊ	—	u :	(,, rule)
எ	—	e	(,, fed)
ஏ	—	e:	(,, able)
ஐ	—	ai	(,, aisle)
ஒ	—	o	(,, opinion)
ஓ	—	o:	(,, opium)
ஔ	—	au	(,, now)

CONSONANTS

				Hints re: articulation
Hard[1] (Plosive)	க	—	k	(as in king, angle, alhambra)
	ச	—	c	(,, church, angel, calcium)
	ட	—	t:	(,, card ?)....Retroflex - articulate with blade of tongue.
	த	—	th	(,, threat, this, thick)....dental.
	ப	—	p	(,, pipe, amber)
	ற	—	t	(,, atlas, sunday, arrears)..Retroflex-articulate with tip of tongue.
Soft (Nasal)	ங	—	ng	(,, sing)....velar n
	ஞ	—	nj	(,, angel)....palatal n
	ண	—	n :	(,, urn ?)....Retroflex n - articulate with blade of tongue.
	ந	—	nh	(,, anthem)....dental n
	ம	—	m	(,, mate)
	ன	—	n	(,, enter)....Retroflex n - articulate with tip of tongue.
Medium (non-nasal continuant)	ய	—	y	(,, yard)
	ர	—	r	(,, red)
	ல	—	l	(,, leave)....Alveolar l - articulate with tip of tongue.
	வ	—	v	(,, very)
	ழ	—	l·	(,, ?)....Retroflex l - articulate with blade of tongue.
	ள	—	l:	(,, hurl)....Alveolar l - articulate with blade of tongue.
Auxiliary[2] (ஆய்தம்)	ஃ	—	x	(,, ahead)

* The Tamil phonemes may for practical purposes be treated as having single allophones only, except in the case of the hard consonants which have four allophones each, as shown in note 1 on the reverse.

1. The Phonemes, classified as *hard*, have normally an *unaspirated unvoiced* value but acquire the following modified values if preceded by a consonant:—

   (a) a *slightly aspirated* unvoiced value, if preceded by a *plosive or hard consonant*.

   e.g., பக்கம் – is pronounced pak**kh**am, not pak**k**am

   (b) an unaspirated but *voiced* value, if preceded by a *nasal or soft consonant*:—

   e.g., பங்கம் – is pronounced pan**g**am, not pan**k**am
   பஞ்சம் – „ pan**j**am, not pan**c**am,

   (c) a *fricative* value if preceded by a *non-nasal continuant or medium consonant or by the auxiliary consonant*.

   e.g., பல்கலை becomes pal**h**alai not pal**k**alai
   எஃகு „ e**hh**u not e**x**ku

NOTE.—In most present day dialects, the plosive assumes a fricative —sometimes a voiced—value after a vowel also, except in the case of t : which retains its normal unaspirated, unvoiced value even after a vowel.

2. The value of this *auxiliary* phoneme, which must *always* be followed by a hard consonant, was variable during the time of Tholkappiam; it acquired a phonetic value identical with that of the following hard consonant, vide 1 (c) above,

   e.g., எஃகு became ehhu

   Later its value became fixed as h, irrespective of the following consonant.

Note. (i) With a view to keep down transliteration to the minimum it is suggested that, in the case of Tamil words which are already in free use in English (e.g., Tamil=Thamil), or where it is unnecessary to indicate the **exact** pronunciation, accurate transliteration need not be resorted to. In the case of proper names etc., which occur more than once in the same article, the transliteration need be shown only once in brackets side by side with a free English adaptation, the latter alone being used subsequently, except of course in cases where such a procedure will lead to ambiguity,

e.g., வேங்கடம்=Vengadam (Ve : ngkat : am).

(ii) Reference may be made to *Tamil Culture*, Vol. IV, No 1 (January 1955 issue) pp. 58-73 for fuller details,

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